



*Any of the Christmas Day sets may be used on the evening of Christmas Eve. The set below is for use in Holy Communion.*

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

*For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines*

### **2 Samuel 7 : 1-5, 8-11, 16**

King David is told that God is content to dwell in the humblest of places. God has always been present., leading and guiding, and can always be trusted to guide and bless. Much of Jewish hope rested on the promise of a king like David, to be born of his line.

### **Psalm 89: 2, 19 - 27**

### **Acts 13 : 16-26**

Paul was invited to speak at a synagogue in Galatia. His Jewish audience heard him briefly review their history under God, and the promise of a Davidic King. The way was prepared, he says; now - to us - Jesus our Saviour has come.

### **Luke 1 : 67-79**

Now the hope of centuries is satisfied, and there is nothing left but praise - the praise of old Zechariah whose own son John will usher into the world the one who is the light of the world.

## **COLLECTS OF THE DAY**

### **Collect One**

O God,  
who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance  
of the birth of thy only Son Jesus Christ;  
Grant that, as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer,  
so we may with sure confidence,  
behold him when he shall come to be our Judge,  
who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, world without end.

**Collect Two**

Almighty God,  
you make us glad with the yearly remembrance  
of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ:  
Grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer,  
we may with sure confidence behold him  
when he shall come to be our judge;  
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE!**

*President*

Lord Jesus, you were born to share with us in all experiences of life. We come to you now, trusting that you will understand the needs of the world, your church and the people for whom we pray.

*Biddings*

Lord Jesus, "Prince of Peace", speak of your wisdom and give guidance to the leaders of nations in ways they can hear and understand. Speak and may your kingdom of peace, justice and righteousness be established on earth.

Lord Jesus, "Mighty God", speak of your holiness to your church throughout the world. Speak and let your people celebrate your birth with a new commitment. Let us joyfully proclaim your glory so that the whole earth is filled with the sound of praise and thanksgiving.

Lord Jesus, "Everlasting Father", speak to your children of your love. Speak and be born again in our hearts today. Speak and let your love surround us and those with whom we share this Christmas. Help us to see you in others so that by loving and serving them we may also love and serve you.

Lord Jesus, "Wonderful Counsellor". Speak words of comfort, love and compassion to those who are suffering bereavement, loneliness or sickness of body or mind. Speak and let them find peace and reassurance in knowing the light of your presence with them in their darkness.

*President*

Lord Jesus, in your compassionate understanding of what it is to be human, hear our prayers. Use them, and us, to bring new peace, joy, love and hope into the lives of those for whom we have prayed. For you are born to bring salvation to all through the grace of God our Father.

**POST COMMUNION**

God for whom we wait,  
you feed us with the bread of eternal life:  
Keep us ever watchful, that we may be ready  
to stand before the Son of Man, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## PRAYERS

### Christmas Eve prayers

God, creator of all life, you made us in your image, and sent your Son to share our flesh. Tonight as we celebrate the glad time of his birth, we pray that your love may be born anew in us. Help us to respond to the greatness of your love by sharing it with others. Amen.

Gracious, loving and merciful God, on this Christmas Eve, as the light of your Word penetrates our hearts, as we are reminded of the gift of life and faith, as the glories of the heavenly hosts are echoed in our church, we open ourselves up to your Spirit and give you thanks. We are grateful, Lord Jesus, that your story has become our story, and we celebrate your birth.

Continue, we pray, to instill in us a profound sense of your abiding presence, and help us to take to heart the wonder of your love, that we may walk in your ways and delight in your will.

Help us, Lord God, to be the faithful, gracious, loving, giving and forgiving people you would have us be.

*Rev. Dr. Sean B. Murray*

Gracious God, your angels broke into the midnight of a sleeping world to sing the news that Christ was born in Bethlehem.

Break into the midnight of our dark world and stir hearts to hear again the message of your love.

O God, on this night of joyful and expectant wonder, we look forward to the coming of the child whose birth was foretold by prophets, acclaimed by angels, and greeted by shepherds.

Open our eyes to see in him your loving purposes, and arouse within us the spirit of adoring praise.

Loving God, in the stillness of this midnight hour, touch our understanding with your Holy Spirit, that we may know again in true reality the wonder of your love in Jesus Christ; and though there was no room for him in Bethlehem's inn, help us to make more room for him in our lives, responding to his love and receiving his peace.

Come, Lord Jesus,  
where there is hatred, give love,  
where there is sadness, give joy,  
where there is discord, give peace.

Come Lord Jesus, be light for our darkness, for the hour of your birth is near.

Come, Lord Jesus, be born in our hearts through faith. Amen.

*(The last part of this prayer adapted from a prayer in Worship Now St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1972)*

O Holy One,  
heavenly angels spoke to earthly shepherds  
and eternity entered time in the child of Bethlehem.  
Through the telling of the Christmas story,  
let our temporal lives be caught up in the eternal  
in that same child,

that we might join shepherds and all the heavenly host  
in praising the coming of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

God of glory,  
your splendour shines from a manger in Bethlehem,  
where the Light of the world is humbly born  
into the darkness of human night.  
Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world,  
so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice,  
and defenders of all for whom there is no room. Amen.

Light of life, you came in flesh,  
born into human pain and joy,  
and gave us power to be your children.  
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,  
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness  
and walk in the way of peace. Amen.

We bless you, Abba, Father,  
for you have visited your people  
in one like us in all things but sin,  
and in human fragility you have revealed  
the face of divinity.  
Gather into your arms  
all the peoples of the world,  
so that in your embrace  
we may find blessing, peace,  
and the fullness of our inheritance  
as your daughters and sons. Amen.

With the angels of heaven we proclaim your glory, O God.  
As the radiance of your presence lights up the heavens,  
we pray for enlightenment  
for your church on behalf of the whole world.  
Grant that, through our prayers,  
our lives may radiate the presence of Christ  
to all who dwell on earth,  
for he is our Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

God of all ages,  
in the birth of Christ  
your boundless love for your people  
shattered the power of darkness.  
Be born in us with that same love and light,  
that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth  
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

### **MEDITATIVE PRAYER**

On normal nights at this time we are asleep and a-dreaming.  
But this is no normal night, this is the night  
when the Dream in the heart of God took flesh

and was born like us, with pain, and water,  
and blood, and crying, and struggle.

*A soloist or choral group could sing e.g., "Let God's dream be born" verses 1, 6, and 7  
from AS ONE VOICE volume two:30*

It seems so long ago and so far away. In Bethlehem in Judea.  
On a cold night in winter, with shepherds startled by stars and angels.  
A night sky so different from ours.  
On this night we are not gathered out in a field,  
shivering with cold and with fear over the appearance of angels.  
We are gathered for worship in centrally heated churches,  
the air fired with candles and heavy with anticipation.  
We choose to be here.

Mary did not choose to give birth in that cold stable  
the only warmth for her the steamy breath of animals.  
Yet in that place, Mary, who had carried this baby  
close to her heart for nine months -- gave birth to a Saviour.  
We are here in the expectation that this Saviour will be born anew  
in our hearts and our lives on this holy night, in this sacred space.  
We join in the angel's song:  
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward all people!  
*Moirra B Laidlaw*

## SERMON

On this holy night the Church invites us to celebrate with joy the great event of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

We know the details of his life so well:

- born of the Virgin Mary in a stable because there was no room in the inn
- wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger – not a cradle

The outward circumstances are of poverty and anonymity but they conceal a mystery. This great mystery would have gone by unnoticed and unknown had not heaven opened and the angels come down to sing of Jesus' birth. After all, as Luke says further on in his Gospel: *No one lights a lamp and puts it under a tub or hides it under a bed.* Jesus was God's light, the light for the whole world, and God his Father wanted him to be seen and known by all. And so he sent the angel to the shepherds tending their sheep in the fields nearby: *Listen, I bring you news of great joy ... today a saviour has been born to you...*

After many years of reflection by the Church we now know that in this child, God himself, has come down to humanity. God has become man in order to give man a share in God's own divinity.

This is the good news of salvation, the message of Christmas, the best news the world has ever heard - the birth of a baby.

But did you notice the first words the angel said?

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*Do not be afraid!*

Of course, in an immediate sense the angel is telling the shepherds not to be afraid of him because the angel's sudden appearance would certainly have startled them. But the angel is speaking also to us, here and now in Sydney. That's why the Holy Scripture is so powerful and relevant; its spirit-filled words are spoken to every people in every age. Do not be afraid!

Firstly, don't be afraid of God. That may seem like a funny thing to say but I truly believe there are many people who are afraid of God, and yet there is no need. God is our loving Father, our loving Creator. He loves us with a deep and faithful love. He understands us, our weaknesses and our broken dreams, our sinfulness and our failures, and yet he loves us. I believe this is one of the main things wrong with humanity today - we don't understand God's love for us. And because of this we don't know how much we are worth. What a sad situation!

Secondly, do not be afraid of the Gospel. The Gospel is indeed Good News of great joy! Do not let your fear block your ears or harden your hearts. Don't be afraid to believe these words from heaven. This is God's word to you.

Thirdly, don't be afraid of this child; don't be afraid of Jesus - he means you no harm. Don't be afraid to open the doors of your heart to him, to give him access to your inner self. Don't be afraid to let him into your relationships, your marriage, your family, your private life. Talk to him, trust him, confide in him because that is why he came. He is looking for you. He wants you to approach him. He already knows you through and through, every detail of your life, and yet he loves you with a love no other person can equal. Don't be afraid of his love; it will bring you healing, completeness, joy, peace and life.

Let me finish off by telling you something which I think is so little known that one could almost call it a secret. On Christmas night God gives us a saving message, yes, of course. He gives us a saving truth which we must believe, yes, I won't argue with that. But most of all God gives us this night a saving relationship, a relationship he invites us to enter.

We are not saved by reading a book or attending a church service. We are saved by entering a relationship.

In the child of Bethlehem God enters a love affair with mankind, a love affair which saves us from our own evil and the evil of others.

He presents himself before us in the manger as a gift of total love and invites us to respond. It is our response that is crucial.

What the angel is saying to us tonight is 'Do not be afraid! This helpless child in the manger is the one you have been longing for, the one who loves you as you need to be loved, as you long to be loved. He alone can satisfy this hunger of yours for love and life.

Do not be afraid to enjoy his favour.'

## CHRISTMAS ILLUSTRATIONS

### The Meaning of the Manger

Every year there is displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York an eighteenth century painting of the nativity scene. It's traditional in every sense except one. Behind the cradle, in the far distance, we see the ruins of the mighty Roman columns. The artist knew the meaning of the Bethlehem manger. The birth of God's new age means the death of man's old world. *Staff Writers, Sermons.com.*

### Getting Rid of the Bah Humbugs

Many years ago the Puritans thought that they were ruining Christmas with all their pagan rituals. They especially objected to the fact that the holiday usually came on a week day, therefore distracting people, they thought, from the Lord's Day of Sunday. But they did more than annually complain about it as we do. They took action and got rid of Christmas altogether. In Puritan settlements across 17th century America a law was passed outlawing the celebration of Christmas. The market place was ordered to stay open for business as though it were no special occasion and all violators were prosecuted. It was against the law to make plum pudding on December 25th. The celebration was not referred to as Yuletide but as fooltide.

So we want to reform Christmas and clean it up do we? Well, is this how far we want to go? Do we really want to be rid of it altogether. Then will Christmas, as the Puritans thought, be saved from us and our sinful ways. So what if we spend \$40 billion annually on presents. Can you think of a better way of spending all that money than on gifts of love. And most of them are just that. And so what if all the lights and tinsel does create a fairy tale setting that soon disappears as does the so called Christmas spirit. At least it lets us know, if only for a brief time, what life can be like if we only try.

So let the message ring out this day, not that we are destroying this holy day, but rather, that we can never destroy this day. Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be for all generations. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord. *Staff Writers, Sermons.com.*

### Celebratory Fires

History records for us an interesting footnote. It was during the dark winter of 1864. At Petersburg, Virginia, the Confederate army of Robert E. Lee faced the Union divisions of General Ulysses S. Grant. The war was now three and a half years old and the glorious charge had long since given way to the muck and mud of trench warfare. Late one evening one of Lee's generals, Major General George Pickett, received word that his wife had given birth to a beautiful baby boy. Up and down the line the Southerners began building huge bonfires in celebration of the event. These fires did not go unnoticed in the Northern camps and soon a nervous Grant sent out a reconnaissance patrol to see what was going on. The scouts returned with the message that Pickett had had a son and these were celebratory fires. It so happened that Grant and Pickett had been contemporaries at West Point and knew one another well, so to honor the occasion Grant, too, ordered that bonfires should be built.

What a peculiar night it was. For miles on both sides of the lines fires burned. No shots fired. No yelling back and forth. No war fought. Only light, celebrating the birth of a child. But it didn't last forever. Soon the fires burned down and once again the darkness took over. The darkness of the night and the darkness of war.

## Christmas Eve YEAR C December 24, 2015

The good news of Christmas is that in the midst of a great darkness there came a light, and the darkness was not able to overcome the light. It was not just a temporary flicker. It was an eternal flame. We need to remember that. There are times, in the events of the world and in the events of our own personal lives, that we feel that the light of the world will be snuffed out. But the Christmas story affirms that whatever happens, the light still shines. *Staff Writers, Sermons.com.*

### ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

**The Blessed Hope of Christmas** - Luke 2: 1 – 20 It is a night of mystery, miracle, and majesty.

<http://www.tellicochurch.com/lectionary-sermons/Sermons/971224.html>

**The message of the Angelic choir** - Luke 2:1-20 - Grace Church Parish - Martha's Vinyard

<http://www.gracechurchmv.com/sermon-2009-12-24-a.php>

**Silent Night - The truce of Christmas 1949 is used effectively** - Theme; A gift we can give, a gift we can receive.

<http://willhumes.net/2006/12/24/christmas-eve-sermon-2006-a-gift-we-receive-a-gift-we-can-give-2/>

**The Shepherds** - "These shepherd were terrified and then touched by God's message, and they believed. They were ready to get up and go to Bethlehem, and afterwards they persisted in telling the Good News to others."

<http://saint-augustines.blogspot.co.uk/2009/12/christmas-eve-year-c-sundaydecember-24.html>

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