

# Sunday Morning Resources

Wednesday 25 December 2024 - Christmas Day

**Lectionary Readings** (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 62. 6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3. 4-7; Luke 2. (1-7) 8-20

## Homily

**Today's homily has been written by the Revd Michael Wilcockson, Assistant Curate - Associate Priest, Linton (Benefice) and Rural Dean of Granta**

I, like millions of others, love Christmas traditions, whether it is carol singing, watching the King's speech in the afternoon, going for the after Christmas dinner walk, or charades and other games in the evening. Traditions are the glue of family and society. Of course, they change over time and every family has its own particular ones. One of these is when is it the right moment to open presents. As a child the answer is, 'as soon as possible on Christmas morning'! But adults have other ideas. 'Let's clear the dinner things,' they say, 'and after we've done the washing up then we'll open presents.' Have adults forgotten what it was like to be a child?

I'm not sure how long it takes for something to become a tradition, but I've only recently become aware of a new Christmas 'tradition' called the 'Christmas Eve Box'. For those of you who have yet catch up with the recent trends, then, a Christmas Eve Box is a box of presents such as: pyjamas, bedtime stories, craft kits, puzzles, a new Christmas stocking, a Christmas joke book, snacks etc etc. All these to open on Christmas Eve in readiness for - for what? Well, more presents on Christmas day! - the idea of the box is to get round all that dreadful waiting.

By contrast, here's another family tradition told to me recently by one of my parishioners. When she was growing up no one was allowed to open any presents on Christmas Day until they had visited the hospital where her father worked as a senior doctor. There they would visit the wards, talk to the patients and then her father would carve an enormous turkey, and they would all help serve Christmas dinner. Only then, once back home, were they allowed to open their presents.

Did this ruin Christmas for the children? Well, it might have been difficult for them, but the fact that my parishioner was telling me the story all these years later was because her experience on the wards told her more about the meaning of Christmas than any sermon. Christmas is of course about gift giving and receiving; God's gift to the world is the gift of himself in the person of Jesus, whose life was dedicated to giving life to others.

Christmas is also about being gracious gift receivers. When the shepherds received the news from the angels of the much hoped for messiah, they rushed to Bethlehem to see the

baby Jesus and his parents. Their joy wasn't merely for what *they* had received, but to give thanks for God's gift to *all* humanity.

The way we give and receive gifts says a lot about our values. The danger with the Christmas Eve Box tradition is that it could easily be about me: *my* gratification and satisfying *my* wants now. This makes fulfilling our desires the only measure of what is good and bad. As long ago as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Protagoras famously said, 'Man is the measure of all things'. Whatever he meant precisely by this, many have seen it as a symptom of what happens when we allow individuals to make up what is right and wrong, when morality is all about me, then we can very quickly destroy the moral glue of society.

Sadly, we see this far too much in our world at present. Whether it is the terrible way in which women and girls have lost almost all their freedoms and human rights in Afghanistan under the Taliban; the ruthless desire of Putin to destroy Ukraine or the vicious struggle for power in Sudan which has claimed some 15,000 lives.

When humans lose sight of human dignity, the cycle of violence and hatred seems to become its own self-defeating tradition.

But the story of the birth of Christ turns the 'man is the measure of all things' upside down. The story is of generosity, selflessness, humility and the simple joy of life. Every birth of a child is a miracle, but for Christians at least, the birth of this particular child, Jesus, reveals a profound truth, that, 'God (not man), in the person of his Son, is the measure of all things.'

When the shepherds told Mary and Joseph what had brought them to the stable in Bethlehem, they and the others were amazed. But when Mary heard their story, she understood the greater implications. Luke puts it simply and profoundly, 'But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart' (Lk 2:19).

Two thousand years later we are still pondering on the meaning and implications of that first Christmas and may it continue as a tradition in all our lives. And may it also provide us and all future generations with the true moral glue which celebrates God-given human goodness, dignity and joy now and for ever.

### ***Ways to Engage all Generations***

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story (of the shepherds and the visit to see the baby Jesus) is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?

- I wonder how Mary felt/the shepherds felt when they saw the baby Jesus?
- I wonder how you might feel if an angel brought you the same news as he did to the shepherds
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what Mary pondered on?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

### ***Suggested intercessions***

- Collect for Christmas Day:

Almighty God,  
you have given us your only-begotten Son  
to take our nature upon him  
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:  
grant that we, who have been born again  
and made your children by adoption and grace,  
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*Or the shorter Collect for Christmas Day:*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
your birth at Bethlehem  
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:  
accept our heartfelt praise  
as we worship you,  
our Saviour and our eternal God.

- Thanksgiving for God who through his love of the world became human in the person of Jesus Christ; who therefore sides with us in our sufferings and our joys
- Our duty in countering suffering caused by injustice, poverty, abusive relationships, loneliness and fear. Pray for the work of charities at this Christmas time who tend to the vulnerable and weak. [Name specific people in your church community who are suffering in body, mind or spirit.]
- For peace and reconciliation especially in the Holy Land in Israel and Hamas, praying especially for the suffering of civilian Palestinians and Israelis. Remembering also the people of Ukraine and Russia, Afghanistan and Sudan, and all other places where there is war and conflict. Pray for those agencies, charities and medical services those who attend those caught up in conflict.
- For ourselves and to be inspired by the Christmas values of generosity, human goodness, dignity, and joy.

- For the Church throughout the world and especially at this time for reconciliation between different denominations. Pray, in particular, for Palestinian Christians and their churches during this time of emergency. For Archbishop Justin and Bishop Dagmar.

### ***Suggested hymns/songs***

O little town of Bethlehem  
O come all ye faithful  
Once in royal David's city  
A great and might wonder  
Away in a manger  
Hark the herald angels sing  
While shepherds watched their flocks by night  
Joy to the world  
In the bleak midwinter  
Love came down at Christmas  
Silent night, holy night  
Come and join the celebration  
The virgin Mary had a baby boy  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
Seeing him lie in a bed of straw  
Jingle bells, jingle bells  
Now we sing to praise love's blessing (Iona)

### **Activities to accompany the service:**

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](http://reflectionary.org) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](http://engageworship) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material

- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>  
(weekly@ lectionary resource)

### **Ideas for all-age worship**

1. [www.allageworshipresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SAAW007-Christmas-Day.pdf](http://www.allageworshipresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SAAW007-Christmas-Day.pdf) Excellent set of resources and ideas for activities and forms of worship.

2. During intercessions prayer cards in the shapes of stars and angels are handed out and each person writes a short prayer or something to be prayed for. Children collect the cards; prayer leader reads out a selection; children place the cards on the Christmas tree (or equivalent).

3. [www.musicademy.com/chocolate-christmas-wonderful-kids-nativity-talk-script/](http://www.musicademy.com/chocolate-christmas-wonderful-kids-nativity-talk-script/) Funny sketch about Mary, angel and birth of Jesus using the names of various chocolates.

4. In groups discuss what is meant by **hope**. Then:

- Play: 'The Christian Hope' by Newsong  
([www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LXjZ6L5S10&t=9s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LXjZ6L5S10&t=9s))
- Light a candle and read John 1:5, 9 and reflect on what Jesus as light of the world means in terms of hope.
- Take the baby Jesus from the nativity and read Luke 2:11. Reflect on how the baby Jesus brings hope to the world.
- If children have brought their presents to church, ask them to show them; then read Romans 15:13 – explain how hope is a gift from God.