

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 28 December 2025 - The First Sunday of Christmas

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 63.7-9; Psalm 148 [or 148.7-14]; Hebrews 2.10-18; Matthew 2.13-23

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Sarah Tan, Chaplain, HMP Littlehey

You are gathered on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year hopefully still full of the joy of the festive spirit and not dreading the sight of yet another mince pie! Then you hear this Gospel reading which brings us all up short, I think. This is a difficult part of the Christmas story which does not fit comfortably with the tinsel, mince pies, presents, rejoicing angels, obedient shepherds and persevering wise men. It feels a long way from the light, hope and joy of the Christ child in the manger we celebrated only a few days ago.

Today's reading speaks of a tyrant of a leader – Herod. A man who was so insecure in his own power that he decided the only response to the Wise Men not returning to tell him where Jesus was, would be to massacre all the children anywhere near Bethlehem who were two years old or under. That is not a normal response or a proportionate one to a perceived threat to his rule and his power but it is what he did. Or rather what he ordered people to do. I don't imagine Herod had any actual blood on his own hands. The whole narrative is horrific and is an uncomfortable passage. Perhaps that is felt even more keenly right on the back of the uplifting Christmas Gospel passages we've heard proclaimed only so recently.

Yet what can we learn from it? Well, we can learn that people do not always choose God's path when making decisions that affect themselves and others and therefore horrible, unspeakable things do happen. We can pray about that and offer those situations we can think of which seem broken beyond repair to God and ask for his healing for them. Things that feel outside of our control we can offer to God in prayer knowing that God listens when we pray and is more powerful than any human leader.

The Gospel passage speaks powerfully of how God protected his Son. He sends an angel to Joseph in a dream and tells Joseph to take the family and go to Egypt to live in exile until he is told it is safe to return again. Joseph as we saw in the Christmas story trusts in God, does what he is asked to do and is faithful to Mary and the baby Jesus. He waits in Egypt with his family until God sends another angel to tell him that now it is safe to return to Israel and he settles in the district of Galilee in the town of Nazareth.

For me this is a reminder that God is with us through all things no matter what life throws in our direction. Often times of joy and happiness are tinged with difficulty or sadness too and likewise when things feel bleak and difficult there are often signs of hope that easier times lie ahead. Rarely in life is everything wonderful or everything awful it is usually a mix of the two.

The season of Christmas for most people is a mix of joy and sadness. For people of faith the joy of celebrating anew the birth of the Christ child is a great festival but one that might also carry reminders of friends and family members who are not gathered round the Christmas table this year for whatever reason. It might be that the state of our world both environmental and political feels so uncertain and so fragile that it is hard to hang on to the hope and the promise of the peace of the Christ Child.

The good news is that God is able to hold all of our emotions. God can encompass our love and our hate, our joy and our sadness, our fear and our joy our frustrations and our contentment. There is nothing which is outside of God, no event or occurrence in life whether on a big stage or our own individual lives which is beyond God's span.

In that sense of God holding absolutely everything there is comfort and much to be grateful for. There is a place for those who are obedient, who rejoice, who trust in God, who are bereaved, who are frightened, who are exiled, who are overwhelmed, who struggle to see God in the midst of all their difficulties.

We are called as Christians to be people who look for the light of Christ every day whether that's been a great day or a terrible one or just a regular, normal day. We are called to look for the signs and glimpses that God is with us no matter what and to be grateful for the fact that God is indeed always with us. We are called to live as people who believe and know that God is present in our world and in our lives and to look for those signs even when others tell us it is hopeless.

How do we look for those signs of God? Well, perhaps God speaks to you through angels, perhaps God speaks to you in the changing seasons, the kindness of friends or strangers, perhaps God speaks to you in the silence of meditative prayer or the pure joy of worship and song. As the year turns and 2026 beckons let us commit ourselves to live as people looking for the light of Christ every day, willing to be surprised and comforted by his presence with us and committed to praying for the world and all its people for there to be joy, light and peace for all.

Ways to Engage all Generations – if I was going to do this with this Gospel reading, I'd focus on the Angels and the travels of Mary, Joseph and Jesus to avoid frightening young children.

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/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

For the peace of the world this Christmas season, we pray. For justice and mercy to be shown to all people, for the leaders of the nations that they would make decisions for the good of all not only for the benefit of those with power and influence.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

For the church throughout the world and for our own Christian community. We pray for our bishops, priests and deacons for all God's faithful people that the joy and the hope of this season will encourage and refresh them.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray for those who today are sick or suffering in body mind or spirit. We pray for those for whom Christmas is difficult or lonely or full of work with no time for festivities. We pray for all those who care for others, those who are paid and those who are not and we pray for kindness, gentleness and patience in their work. We pray for your healing touch for all those who need it.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We remember before God those who have died. We remember those who we miss particularly at this time of year. We pray for all who mourn that they would be comforted and for all who have departed this life that they now dwell in heavenly rest.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

In a few moments of quiet we bring to God those things which are on our hearts and in our minds today. Those things we are grateful for, those things we are worried about and those people and places and situations we know of that are in need our prayers.

(silence)

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Merciful Father

Accept these prayers

for the same of your Son

Our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

Ye Holy Angels Bright

Let us praise God together

Unto Us a Boy is Born

Angel Voices ever Singing

Of the Father's Love Begotten

In Christ there is no east or west

Immortal Invisible God only wise

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace

Like a Candle Flame

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](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)