

Sunday 20th December 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer (adapted from material provided by Christian Aid for Advent)

Even if we cannot physically gather:

God is with us

Even if Christmas celebrations are different:

God is with us

Even if we might not be able to hug family and friends: God is with us

Even if we cannot sing carols in church buildings:

God is with us

Even if Christmas cheer is harder this year:

God is with us

Emmanuel, God with us, we come before you in worship and praise. We remember that you are ever faithful, eternally loving, and mysteriously present always. Amen

Hymn: Tell out my soul (Singing the Faith 186)

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqwoqRo9N6E>

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;

tender to me the promise of his word;

in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!

Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;

his mercy sure, from age to age the same;

his holy name -- the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by;

proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,

the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!

Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

to children's children and for evermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Let us pray together:

Emmanuel, God with us,

we rejoice in your faithful and eternally loving nature, as we remember the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, your Son.

Like Mary, we want to rejoice and sing of your love for all creation. From mountain tops and ocean depths, we want all creation to hear the amazing story of your unfathomable generosity and grace.

We give thanks that you cannot be contained, boxed in, or trapped by us for our selfish purposes. You need to be free to be among your people in every situation we face.

To accept your call on our lives is dangerous, risky but above all transformative and life-giving. This morning we rejoice in the knowledge of your love.

Forgive us for the times we have obstructed your message, deliberately or unknowingly.

We hear Christ's gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven. Amen. Thanks be to God.'

Today's Reading from the Old Testament:

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.'

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found

favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Time to Reflect

It has been a while since I have read Samuel, and it came to me afresh as I read it through for the purposes of preparing this reflection.

God reminds Samuel that he does not need a house, a temple, a place to be contained. God is a free agent, who does not need a building.

Well that's a bit of luck because for many of us, our church buildings have been closed, or for the brief period when we were able to enter the building everything was different.

Instead we have used material such as this to help us worship. Perhaps you have used the Methodist Worship Book, the Prayer Handbook, your hymnbook, television or radio services, or various online platforms.

We can encounter God in a myriad of different ways and in different places, just read through our scriptures and see for yourself.

Mary encountered God's purpose for her through the voice of an angel, a messenger from God. A frightening, awesome, thrilling experience – one that caused her to sing a song that continues to stir the hearts of people today.

Mary became the one who housed the Son of God for a short time in her womb. Her call was to nurture and protect him whilst he was an infant; after that she could no longer contain him, he was free to go where he was needed. Free to challenge, to change, to transform, and to reveal God's love to all he met.

As we prepare for a Christmas that may be unlike any that we have experienced, remember God does not need a building from which to be discovered and worshipped. We can celebrate the birth of Christ in our own homes. Rejoice that God revealed in Christ continues to be made known and calls people to follow and to serve.

Take a moment to think about the times you have encountered God beyond bricks and mortar. Or remember the words of a messenger, who changed your life and helped you see God. Give thanks for those moments and, perhaps like Mary, rejoice from deep within that the love of the one who entered our world as flesh and blood, continues to be experienced.

Take a time to sit quietly

During this season the Methodist Church is proclaiming "God is with us". God is with us is more than a statement. It's a reminder that God is always with us. We are encouraged to share our story (and other people's stories) of walking with God in this extraordinary year. How might you share how God has been with you this week? Find out more here

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/christmas/>

A time of prayer

God of light and love,
you entered our world bringing hope and healing to the nations. The world today needs to hear your message of healing and reconciliation.

We remember the nations of the world where there is enmity, distrust of one another, and bloodshed.
May your message of peace be made real.

We remember those who have no home to call their own, those living on the streets or in refugee camps.
May your message of justice for all be heeded.

We remember those whose lives have been affected by Covid-19: through the death of loved ones, long-term health difficulties, loss of income.
May your message of hope be heard.

We remember those who live in poverty, those who live in fear, those who are anxious, those for whom Christmas means isolation and loneliness.
Encourage and equip us to be your messengers, offering words and deeds that bring comfort and relief in the name of Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to Garth Hewitt sing:

Light a Candle in the darkness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0agQyxTVwY>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'.
(Romans 15: 13)

Original Materials by **Revd Deborah Cornish**

All

Hymns reproduced under CCLi 1144191.

Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here

The Big Church Sing Christmas Special was broadcast live on the Methodist Church's YouTube channel on Sunday 29 November. Have you seen it yet? If you have access to the internet go to

<https://www.youtube.com/methodistchurch>