

Travelling to Christmas

A SERVICE FOR ADVENT



LONGTOWN METHODIST CHURCH
Saturday 26th November 2011
3.00pm

Followed by refreshments which will
be served in the Church

***[Those taking part will enter together and sit around the table
on which is placed an Advent Ring]***

LEADER

Throughout Advent millions of Jesus' followers will converge on Bethlehem in person and in thought, to relive and reflect on the events which brought about the Incarnation of our Lord, Jesus Christ – The Incarnation!

Bethlehem has been the destination of many journeys throughout history. Prophets and visionaries; people of wisdom from many Faiths; Mary and Joseph; shepherds and kings, have all completed the journey of their dreams in this place.

Bethlehem has also been the beginning of countless faith journeys made by those who have seen the power and splendour of God in the birth of his Son, Jesus. They have known the magnetism of his Spirit drawing them to journey deeper into faith and to live the life of heaven here and now.

Our service looks at some of the well-known Advent journeys and invites us to consider our own faith journey in the light of those who travelled towards Christ Jesus at his coming into the world.

HYMN

Lo, he comes with clouds descending
Once for favoured sinners slain
Thousand, thousand saint attending
Swell the triumph of his train;
Alleluia! God appears on earth to reign.

Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see.

Those dear tokens of his passion
Still his dazzling body bears;
Cause of endless exultation
To his ransomed worshippers;
With what rapture gaze we on those glorious scars.

Yea, amen, let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne
Saviour, take the power and glory,
Claim the kingdom for thine own;
Come, Lord Jesus! Everlasting God, come down!

Everyone's Journey – Isaiah 52: 1 - 10

All sing; Advent candles tell their story
As we watch and pray,
Longing for the day of glory
Come Lord soon, we say.
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness,
Changed for gladness on that day.

READER [Isaiah] [lights the first Advent Candle]

From the beginning of all things, the whole world has been making the Advent journey. It has been our common response to the deep natural longings in us for truth – for a meaning and purpose to life.

The story of God's people is the record of a pilgrimage – a journey to know more of God –to come closer to him – to share his life and purpose for his world.

The prophet Isaiah drew for us a picture of a messenger running across the hills with an urgent word for God's people. He described it as a beautiful sight, full of hope and promise. His picture illustrated the coming of a day when God would come to his people; when he would be recognised as King, and everyone would live under his peaceful rule, assured of his presence and power. God gave Isaiah a sign of this promise – *A virgin will become pregnant; she will have a son; he will be called Emmanuel, the name which means, 'God is with us'*

As we make our Advent journey, may we long for God's Kingdom of love, justice and peace in our own lives and in the life of our world. May we come close to Jesus, to see his birth as our sign that our longings are being fulfilled.

In a short period of silence let us think of Jesus as the hope of the world

PRAYER

Lord, as we make our Advent journey, may we thrill to the message of good news, and the vision of peace and justice for all through Jesus – our Immanuel – God with us.

HYMN

The Angel Gabriel from heaven came;
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
'All hail', said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady'
Gloria!

For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee,
Thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favoured lady,
Gloria!

*Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
'To me be as it pleaseth God', she said
'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name':*
Most highly favoured lady:
Gloria!

Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say,
'Most highly favoured lady'
Gloria!

Heaven to Earth

[Luke 1: 26 – 38]

All Sing

Prophet voices loudly crying
Making pathways clear
Glimpsing glory, self-denying
Calling all to hear through their message –
Challenge shaken – hearts awaken – God is near.

READER [The Angel Gabriel] [lights the second Advent Candle]

At the right time in the history of our world, the prophecies and promises from across centuries came true. Advent began with the angel Gabriel entering the everyday world of Nazareth. He announced to an understandably fearful and confused Mary, that she, engaged to Joseph, was to be the mother of Jesus – the Son of God – the Saviour of the world. Her son – God’s Son – would be the long-promised King who would set up his Kingdom of love, peace and justice – a kingdom which would last for ever.

Heaven had broken into the everyday – but not for the first time – or the last! We may not often be aware of angels, but every time we pray, worship, and as we live the life of God’s Kingdom, heaven and earth intermingle.

May our Advent journey be one of many angel meetings – moments when we can reach out and touch eternity. All the way we shall have the same assurances the angel gave to Mary;
There is no need to be afraid;
The Holy Spirit will be with you and in you;
Nothing is impossible for God.

In a short silence we think of Gabriel’s words

PRAYER

Lord, as we prepare for Christmas with mixed joys and anxieties, may we know moments when heaven breaks into our lives; when we feel you near and real; when our faith is inspired and renewed.

The World to Bethlehem [Matthew 2:1-12]

All Sing:

John the Baptist by his preaching
and by water poured
brought to those who heard his teaching
news of hope restored
'keep your vision strong and steady
and be ready for the Lord'

READERS [Three Magi who read the three sections and light the third Advent Candle]

The longest Advent journey was made by the Magi, the kings from the East – a centre of religious faith and spiritual searching. They had studied the stars and the ancient scriptures. Now, guided by the Spirit, they travelled west to Judea.

They were representatives of all people and all faiths. By their coming we learn that everyone, everywhere may find in Jesus the fulfilment of their deepest spiritual yearning and their highest hopes for a peaceful world.

May our Advent journey give us deep satisfaction of heart and mind, and raise our expectation of the Kingdom of God being established in our society today. May it inspire us to work and pray for all the world to know that same satisfaction and peace which is found at the end of the road to Jesus.

In a short silence we think of the wisdom of the Magi

PRAYER

Lord, let the light which came into the world with Jesus, shine in and through our lives. Let the whole world be flooded with his light of truth and love.

HYMN

Lord the light of Your love is shining.
In the midst of the darkness shining:
Jesus, Light of the world shine upon us;
Set us free by the truth you now bring us,
Shine on me; Shine on me
*Shine, Jesus shine,
fill this land with the Father's glory
blaze, Spirit blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow river flow,
Fill the nations with grace and mercy;
Send forth your word,
Lord and let there be light.*

*Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
From the shadows into your radiance;
by Your blood I may enter Your brightness
search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me: Shine on me.
Shine Jesus shine.....*

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory;
mirrored here may our lives tell Your story
Shine on me; Shine on me.
Shine Jesus shine....

Nazareth and Judea Luke 1 39 - 56

All Sing: Mary's gift beyond all telling
was to give Christ room;
She gave God a human dwelling a mother's womb.
Who could guess the final story?
Cross- and glory -empty tomb

READERS [Mary and Elizabeth who light the fourth Advent Candle]

Mary and Elizabeth had secrets to share and difficulties to face together. We may imagine Mary's thoughts on her hurried journey to her cousin's home in the hills – her mingled excitement, fear and anxiety. But she travelled with the angel's promises from God. The months she and Elizabeth spent together were a journey of faith. Together they comforted one another, confirming their conviction that they were sharing in the purposes of God.

Mary's song of praise gives us some idea of the thoughts they shared about God the Saviour. She sang of God's great power; of his holiness and his mercy; of his justice and his provision for the needy; and most of all, of his care for humble and obedient people.

May our Advent journey bring us times of fellowship in which we discover more of the wonder of our Saviour God and of the way of humble service to which he calls us.

In a short period of silence let us think of our shared fellowship.

PRAYER

Lord, in the fellowship of your people on the Advent journey, let us discover more of your glory; be prompted to praise you from adoring hearts; and willingly offer you our humble service in the work of your Kingdom.

HYMN

Born in the night ,Mary's child
A long way from your home.
Coming in need,
Mary's child, born in a borrowed room.

Clear shining Light, Mary's child
Your face lights up our way.
Light of the world,
Mary's child, dawn on our darkened day.

Truth of our life, Mary's child.
You tell us God is good.
Prove it is true
Mary's child. go to your cross of wood.

Hope of the world, Mary's child,
You're coming soon to reign
King of the earth,
Mary's child, walk in our streets again.

Nazareth to Bethlehem – Luke 2: 1 - 7

All Sing;

Advent candles tell their story
on this Christmas day.
Those who waited for God's glory
they prepared the way
Christ is with us; loving; giving;
in us living; here today.

READERS

[Mary and Joseph who light the fifth Advent Candle]

This journey was different. It was not taken by choice as were the other Advent journeys. Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem on the orders of Rome, yet their true obedience was to God who had chosen and called them. What faith, to go to Bethlehem trusting God's purpose was all bound up with the politics of the Roman empire! The future of the world depended not on the census, but on their faith journey.

They had no idea what lay ahead of them - closed doors - a stable - worship of kings and shepherds - pain - sorrow - homelessness - all our human condition, but they travelled trusting God's promises. He was with them - as he would be with all people.

Our Advent journey may lead us through joy and sorrow, certainty and anxiety. May we travel in faith with the knowledge that God is with us - Christ Jesus is both our destiny and our present companion.

In a short period of silence let us think of uncertainty, and rejection turned into hope and light.

PRAYER

Lord, lead us on our faith journey, into the excitement and wonder of Christmas and your Incarnation. Give us grace to travel together with your people and to find Jesus in a new and more wonderful way, that we may worship him as our Emmanuel - God with us!

PRAYERS

Of intercession - either in quiet personal thoughts, or some suggested themes - visualising the world with all its needs coming to Bethlehem to worship Christ, the Lord.

HYMN

Sing we the King who is coming to reign
Glory to Jesus the Lamb who was slain!
Life and salvation, his empire shall bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King.
*Come let us sing; Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King.
This is our song who to Jesus belong,
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King.
Come let us sing....

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin:
Doubt shall not darken his witness within.
Hell has no terrors and death has no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King.
Come let us sing...

Kingdom of Christ for thy coming we pray;
Hasten, O Father the dawn of the day.
When this new song thy creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished, and Jesus is King.
Come let us sing..

BLESSING

The Lord go with us on our Advent journey!

We will travel with him in faith, and hope and love.

Emmanuel - God is with us!