

God of the familiar, we thank you for the familiar scriptures at Christmastide. Speak through them of hope renewed, of steadfast love, of faith that flows full and free within and beyond the familiar carols and services. May your spirit call out goodness from all who feel tired and estranged from the familiar today. Emmanuel, God with us, be with them.

God of the strange, we pray for all those who today miss familiar rituals and traditions - both family and religious. We pray for all those today who are sad or lonely, all those who feel cut off from loved ones. Emmanuel, God with us, be with them.

God of good will, we pray that these difficult times may call out goodwill from all who are made in your image. Bless, we pray, all those who reach out with Good News, with practical help, with simple friendship. Where we become caught up in ourselves, break in with your message that "it is in giving out to all that we receive" Thank you for love and hope made known to us in our Saviour, Christ Jesus. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer *Our Father*

Listen to the Calypso carol with 2500 voices singing together (StF 216) **or sing a carol that comes to mind.**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2ujyrrL9_s

See him lying on a bed of straw; draughty stable with an open door, Mary cradling the babe she bore; the Prince of Glory is his name:
O now carry me to Bethlehem to see the Lord of love again; just as poor as was the stable then, the Prince of Glory when he came.

Star of silver, sweep across the skies, show where Jesus in the manger lies; shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise to see the Saviour of the world:

Angels, sing again the song you sang, sing the story of God's gracious plan; sing that Beth'lem's little baby can be the Saviour of us all:

Mine are riches from your poverty, from your innocence, eternity; mine, forgiveness by your death for me; child of sorrow for my joy:
Michael Perry (1942-1996)

A prayer of blessing

May the wisdom of the Wonderful Counsellor, The peace of the Prince of Peace, The love of the everlasting Father And the blessing of our mighty God Rest on us and all those we pray for This Christmas Day and always. **Amen**

Original Materials by Phil Challis

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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>



God bless you all – Vanessa & John



This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use if you are unable to attend a Methodist Church at this time. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you. You might like to find a Christmas card with a nativity scene on it. Place it where you can see it during this worship. If you would like to, then light a candle and place it nearby.

Opening Prayer

Here we are, Jesus, this Christmas Day
Here you are, Lord Jesus,
always ready for us.
Here I am God, ready for you
Here you are Emmanuel, always with us
Grant us your Spirit of joy and peace.

StF 202 Hark! The herald angels sing

Read /pray /proclaim the words or join in with a congregation singing it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDPwNPAV6tA>

Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim:
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'

Hark! The herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel:

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth:
Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together

Glory to God in the Highest!
Glory to our newborn King Jesus!
Glory to the Spirit of peace and joy!
Glory to God who loves the world so much that he sent His Son to live and work and show God's Kingdom here on earth.

Glory to Emmanuel God here and now, who joins me with all the followers of Jesus across the globe as we offer our Christmas worship. **Amen**

A Christmas Collect

God of light and hope,
Of stars and surprises:
Open our eyes to your glory
and our hearts to your presence,
that we may respond with joy to the angel song; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen *(MWB p526)*

Today's Reading from the Old Testament
Isaiah 9:2-7 Good News

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.

They lived in a land of shadows,
 but now light is shining on them.
 You have given them great joy, Lord;
 you have made them happy.
 They rejoice in what you have done,
 as people rejoice
 when they harvest grain
 or when they divide captured wealth.
 For you have broken the yoke
 that burdened them
 and the rod that beat their shoulders.
 You have defeated the nation
 that oppressed and exploited
 your people,
 just as you defeated the army of
 Midian long ago.
 The boots of the invading army
 and all their bloodstained clothing
 will be destroyed by fire.
 A child is born to us!
 A son is given to us!
 And he will be our ruler.
 He will be called, "Wonderful Counsellor,"
 "Mighty God," "Eternal Father,"
 "Prince of Peace."
 His royal power will continue to grow;
 his kingdom will always be at peace.
 He will rule as King David's successor,
 basing his power on right and justice,
 from now until the end of time.
 The Lord Almighty is determined
 to do all this.

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 2:1-14

The Birth of Jesus

At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria.

Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born—Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
 and peace on earth
 to those with whom he is pleased!"

Time to Reflect

If you are feeling shut out from normal worship this morning then the shepherds are in the story just for you.

Out in the fields they rarely had a chance to "go to worship". They "knew their place" as Ronnie Corbett said repeatedly in that old sketch about the British class system. It is characteristic of Luke that he records the loving action of God to reach out to the least, the excluded, the lonely. The angel brings to them Good News. After fear, their response is joy and action, leading to wonder, delight and worship.

How might this apply to you on this most strange of Christmas Days?
 "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."
 I wonder what treasured memories of Christmases past you hold in your heart?
 What joyous memories can you ponder in the quiet moments of this day?

Take a time to sit quietly, and perhaps listen to this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxclAV-gLp8>

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
 How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.
 For poor on'ry* people like you and like I...
 I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus
 'twas in a cow's stall,
 With wise men and farmers
 and shepherds and all.
 But high from God's heaven
 a star's light did fall,
 And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
 A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing,
 Or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing,
 He surely could have it,
 'cause he was the King.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
 How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.
 For poor on'ry* people like you and like I...

I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

***Means "ordinary"**

Note:

This carol from the Appalachian mountain region was Collected by John Jacob Niles in Murphy, NC in July 1933 from a young traveling evangelist Annie Morgan. According to Niles, he asked her to sing the song repeatedly until he had memorized it. It was published in his 1934 Songs of the Hill-Folk. Written in a minor key, it's qualities of pensiveness make it one of today's most popular carols.

GOD IS WITH US

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 outreach, we thank you for coming amongst us in Jesus. We marvel at your humility, emptying yourself "of all but love". We recognize our privilege and pray for those with no home, those who have had to travel to foreign lands, those who flee persecution. Emmanuel, God with us, be with them.