

## **The Nativity of our Lord – a liturgy for Christmas night worship at home**

*(The first service of Christmas Day)*

### **Introduction**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Welcome all wonders in one sight! Eternity shut in a span. Summer in winter, day in night, heaven in earth and God in man. Great little one whose all-embracing birth brings earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.*

We come to celebrate the birth of the child who would bring the joy of God's saving love to the whole world. As we gather here this night our Saviour is present among us, not as a little helpless baby, but as our risen Lord. So let us cast aside fear and open our hearts to receive the joy that only he can give.

### **Act of Penitence**

Christ the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts. In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

God our Father, you sent your Son full of grace and truth: forgive our failure to receive him.

Lord, have mercy

Jesus our Saviour, you were born in poverty and laid in a manger: forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.

Christ, have mercy.

Spirit of love, your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call: forgive the hardness of our hearts.

Lord, have mercy.

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw you to himself, that you may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh, and be cleansed from all your sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Gloria** – *the following or some other hymn of praise*

*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.*

*Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.*

*For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

### **Collect of Christmas Night**

*Let us pray in the peace of this Christmas celebration that our joy in the birth of Christ will last for ever.*

Eternal God, who made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of your one true light: bring us, who have known the revelation of that light on earth, to see the radiance of your heavenly glory; 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 forever. Amen.

### **Tonight's readings**

*A reading from the prophet Isaiah*

(9:2 – 7)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.  
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when  
dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of  
their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and for evermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

*This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God*

Psalm 96: 1 – 3 & 11 – 13, with refrain:

***Today a saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord.***

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth.

Sing to the Lord and bless his name; tell out his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations and his wonders among all peoples.

***Today a saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord.***

Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad; let the sea thunder and all that is in it.

Let the fields be joyful and all that is in them; let all the trees of the wood shout for joy before the Lord.

***Today a saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord.***

For he comes, he comes to judge the earth; with righteousness he will judge the world and the peoples with his truth.

***Today a saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord.***

*A reading from the letter of St Paul to Titus* (2: 11 – 14)

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

*This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

*Acclamation to greet the Gospel:*

Alleluia, Alleluia!

I bring you news of great joy:

Today a saviour has been born to us, Christ the Lord

Alleluia!

*Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke (2: 1 - 14)*

*Glory to you, O Lord*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judaea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace among those whom he favours!'

*This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.*

### **Homily**

It was a night of meetings. On this night all those years ago, there was a meeting of heaven and earth, a meeting between God and humanity, in a way that has never been surpassed. As we have just heard in the Gospel reading, the event is captured brilliantly by Luke, the great storyteller. In a delightfully poetic way he tells of God stepping into the story of humanity, and he shows us that the people who were caught up in the event were the poor and

religiously despised, the little people of the world. We are introduced first to Mary and Joseph, two unimportant people from a remote backwater of the Roman Empire.

There was no room for them at the inn. In a sense that symbolised the religion of the day: it was too full, too noisy, too narrow, too closed. It had no room for the likes of Mary and Joseph, certainly no room for a mother about to give birth to a child out of wedlock. It could not see the bigger picture, could not recognise where God really was, and so welcome and worship him there. But in the cave that serves as a stable or cattle shed, gathered round the manger, the animals' feeding trough, which serves as the child's cot, the fullness of God's life and love is welcomed by those whose hearts are empty enough to receive, silent enough to listen and open enough to wonder, and give thanks and praise.

Luke tells us that the first visitors to the child are simple shepherds. They are directed to Bethlehem, the town of David, the shepherd who became a king. They find the king who became shepherd. He whose role among people was as a shepherd in search of lost sheep is presaged by the appearance of shepherds as he is introduced on the stage of the world.

And in the background, we have the chorus of heaven breaking through to give meaning to this drama, so that we may understand the story for what it really is. It is the mystery, the miracle, of God actually stepping into human life through the birth of this child, and in a way that we can understand. As we read the Christmas stories, that is the message, the only message that is really important, and certainly the truth that we are being urged to grasp. As the creed puts it: 'For us and for our salvation he became incarnate....,' fully human. God becomes one of us and one with us in the experience of human life.

The coming of God into our human condition, as only God could or would, can only be described as divine generosity, a supreme act of love on the part of our Creator, the source and ground of our very being. Because of this we are assured that our lives from cradle to grave are of immense and eternal value, and that God reaches, as it were, down to us wherever in human life we may be.

With compassionate love God shares in human life so that we might share in God's life, both now and in the fullness of eternity. This is indeed good news. But as with all news we can receive it or ignore it or refuse to believe it. Many

people rejected Jesus when he was on this earth. Many have rejected him since. But as the fourth Gospel puts it, for those who welcomed him and accepted him it was like a new birth. It has always been so.

And it remains true that in order to receive and to experience the love of God made known in Christ, we too need a cave and a manger. The cave represents our emptiness as we acknowledge our need of God, our need of a healer, a saviour. And our manger is the heart that hungers for God's presence and thirsts for God's will.

The first cave and manger were at Bethlehem, a name which means 'house of bread.' Jesus grew up to be the bread of God's life, bread and life that would be broken in complete self-giving love. Whenever we break bread as part of the Church's continuing celebration of remembrance and thanksgiving for the divine generosity, we are in a new house of bread, a new Bethlehem, a new meeting with God, who reaches down to us in love to raise us up.

We have something truly wonderful to celebrate at Christmas. By God's good grace may its meaning and power continue to transform our lives this Christmas and in every season of the new year.

*A few moments of silent reflection is recommended*

**The Profession of Faith**, *either the following or one of the traditional creeds:*

*We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.*

*We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.*

*We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.*

*We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord Jesus, you were born to share with us in all experiences of life. We come to you now, trusting that you will understand the needs of the world, your church and the people for whom we pray.

**Lord, in your Mercy .....Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, speak of your wisdom and give guidance to the leaders of nations in ways they can hear and understand. Speak and may your kingdom of peace, justice and righteousness be established on earth. We lift to you the United Kingdom, Spain and their leaders; give them the grace and

wisdom to lead the nations during the Pandemic. We pray too for the United States of America in their time of transition

**Lord, in your Mercy .....Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, Mighty God, speak of your holiness to your church throughout the world. Bless and keep our Bishops, priests, deacons and lay ministers. Speak and let your people celebrate your birth with a new commitment. Let us joyfully proclaim your glory so that the whole earth is filled with the sound of praise and thanksgiving.

**Lord, in your Mercy .....Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, Everlasting Father, speak to your children of your love. Speak and be born again in our hearts. Speak and let your love surround us and those with whom we share this Christmas. Help us to see you in others so that by loving and serving them we may also love and serve you.

**Lord, in your Mercy .....Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, Wonderful Counsellor, speak words of comfort, love and compassion to those who are suffering bereavement, loneliness or sickness of body or mind. Speak and let them find peace and reassurance in knowing the light of your presence with them in their darkness.

**Lord, in your Mercy .....Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, in your compassionate understanding of what it is to be human, hear our prayers. Use them, and us, to bring new peace, joy, love and hope into the lives of those for whom we have prayed. For you are born to bring salvation to all through the grace of God our Father, to whom we now commend ourselves and all for whom we have prayed:

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

**Our Father.....**

*You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.*

In union, dear Father, with Christian people throughout the world and across the centuries gathered to make Eucharist, hearing your holy Word and receiving the Precious Body and Blood, I offer you praise and thanksgiving. Even though I am exiled from tasting the Bread of Heaven and drinking the Cup of Life, I pray that you will unite me with all the baptised and with your Son who gave his life for us. Come Lord Jesus, dwell in me and send your Holy Spirit that I may be filled with your presence. Amen.

### **Concluding Prayer**

God our Father, in this night you have made known to us again the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him until the day dawns and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts. To him be glory now and for ever. Amen

### **Blessing**

May the Father, who has loved the eternal Son from before the foundation of the world, shed that love upon you his children. Amen.

May Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill you with joy and peace. Amen.

May the Holy Spirit, by whose overshadowing Mary became the God-bearer, give you grace to carry the good news of Christ. Amen.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you (and those you love and pray for) this Christmastime and always. Amen.

Go in peace. Proclaim the Word made flesh. Glory, thanks and praise to God.