



Worship Together at Home



Welcome

Good morning and a Happy Christmas to you! Whether you are joining us on Christmas Day, Boxing Day or any other day, we welcome you to this time when we can just pause for thought and reflect on God's gift to us.

We recognise that the season of advent has been a very busy time for many of you and we want to say thank you for all you have done and you have given within your communities over these past few weeks and over the past year. We hope that you can now relax and take in all the blessings of this day.

To begin our worship together I invite you sing along to **Sweet Chiming Christmas bells** and then we will share in a familiar passage from Scripture from John 1:1-18. These words are taken from the Voice translation.....the translation may not be so familiar but it helps to bring a fresh perspective and understanding to the ancient text.....

2. Thanks be to God,
since all may learn
The bells' exultant
theme;

The babe of Bethlehem
was born
This lost world to
redeem.

The bells ring out at
Christmas time Their
message loud and clear:
Our hearts are stirred as on
the air
The joyful sound we hear.

*Sweet chiming Christmas
bells,
Sweet Chiming Christmas
bells.....*

*They cheer us on our
heav'nward way,
Sweet chiming bells...*

3. Glad message of the
Christmas bells Of God
whose name is love!
O, may this music all our
days
Our hope and comfort
prove!

Bible reading

John 1: 1-18

(The voice)

¹ Before time itself was measured, the Voice was speaking.

The Voice was and is God.

² This *celestial* Word remained ever present with the Creator;

³ His speech shaped the entire cosmos.

Immersed in the practice of creating,

all things that exist were birthed in Him.

⁴ His breath filled all things

with a living, breathing light—

⁵ A light that thrives in the depths of darkness,

blazes through murky bottoms.

It cannot and will not be quenched.

⁶ A man named John, who was sent by God, *was the first to clearly articulate the source of this Light.* ⁷ This *baptizer* put in plain words the *elusive mystery of the Divine Light* so all might believe through him. *Some wondered whether he might be the Light,* ⁸ but John was not the Light. He merely pointed to the Light. ⁹ The true Light, who shines upon *the heart of everyone,* was coming into the cosmos.

¹⁰ He entered our world, a world He made; yet the world did not recognize Him. ¹¹ Even though He came to His own people, they refused to *listen and* receive Him. ¹² But for all who did receive and trust in Him, He gave them the right to be *reborn as* children of God; ¹³ He bestowed this birthright not by human power or initiative but by God's will.

¹⁴ The Voice took on flesh *and became human* and chose to live alongside us. We have seen Him, enveloped in undeniable splendor—the one *true* Son of the Father—*evidenced in* the perfect balance of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John *the Baptist* testified about Him and shouted, "This is the one I've been telling you is coming. He is much greater than I am because He existed *long* before me." ¹⁶ Through this man we all receive *gifts of* grace beyond our imagination. ¹⁷ You see, Moses gave *us* rules to live by, but Jesus the Anointed offered *us* gifts of grace and truth. ¹⁸ God, unseen until now, is revealed in the Voice, God's only Son, *straight from* the Father's heart.

In the face of a child

All the stars sang together on that first Christmas Day,
And the stars are still singing; can you hear what they say?
Angels join in the chorus, maybe ten million strong.
Can you make out the meaning and the sense of their song?

*God is hidden no more, He has spoken His mind,
Wrapped the gift of His love in the stuff of mankind.
Now His nature is known: God is love undefiled,
And His love is revealed in the face of a child.*

Shepherds too come to wander, moved to tears by the scene
Of a child in a manger: What on earth can it mean?
And the wise come to worship, go away with great joy.
Have they learned a new lesson from this new little boy?

*God is hidden no more, He has spoken His mind,
Wrapped the gift of His love in the stuff of mankind.
Now His nature is known: God is love undefiled,
And His love is revealed in the face of a child.*

I wonder if you have favourite Christmas memories? I have a number of them.....Christmas dinner sat in the hairdressing shop.....I hasten to add it was run by my mum and situated at the front of our house -we simply went through a door to get to it...but it was the only room, at the time, that was big enough to seat our family; grandparent, great-auntie, uncle and cousin around a table. I remember each one of us rooting through the Christmas pudding to see if we were the one who had a sixpence. Suddenly my grandad pulled a pound note out of his pudding! (Pound notes – can you even remember them?) Grandad had planted it and I can still see him laughing at our faces, unable to get his words out, as we just looked on in astonishment!

Then there was the time a different year.....that mum sent me into the same shop to get a her a hairbrush. She was probably expecting a squeal of delight from me as I opened the door because, in it's absence I heard her shout..... "have you put the light on?"

I knew exactly where to go for a hairbrush but..... I put the light on anyway.....and there, in front of me was the new bike that I'd been hoping for!

Then there were the Boxing Day meals when our family would go to a local restaurant. I loved getting together with wider family, putting on our new outfits bought especially for the occasion, watching old cine films and playing sardines. (for those of you who have never played it....sardines is a sort of reverse hide and seek!) How so many of us children fit into the small coat cupboard in my uncle's house still amazes me to this day!

Boxing day with the wider family was something of a tradition for a number of years in our house.....but it was a tradition we had to let go of as our family kept on

growing. I think once we got beyond 46 people we stopped all getting together.....it just became too manic.....

I wonder, do you have special memories or traditions connected with Christmas or Boxing Day?

For some of us it's the time when we can truly relax. Everything is done and we have a little more headspace! Perhaps you're a Boxing Day sales person? Or maybe you like to hit the shops to return gifts that don't fit or don't work! Are you persuaded by all the usual adverts for holidays and is it usually a time when you begin to search for your next adventure.....

Historically, Boxing Day was a day for giving..... It was a day when servants would be given a day off by their Masters. It was a day when alms (collections for the poor) would be given out. It was a day when rich landowners would give gifts to those living and working on their land.

I don't think we should be embracing everything to do with all those traditions anymore.....but the essence of *giving* that is within those traditions is something that we can hold on to.

In John 3:16 we are reminded that God expressed His love for the world by *giving*. He *gave* Jesus. He didn't hold back but instead offered Him freely to us all. The gift of Jesus is available for each and everyone of us to take hold of.

At this time of year we are reminded in so many ways of this gift. Many of us will have nativity scenes in our homes. We sing Christmas Carols that tell us something of the account of Him coming into our world. We hear songs on the radio that speak of His birth....and hopefully you have found time to join with Mary and '*ponder these things in your heart.*'

In the nativity scene in our house that stays out all year long, the figure of Jesus lays in the manger and looks towards a window that has a cross within it.....and I often ponder the significance of that. Of course, it's just an image.....but it's a poignant image....the Christ child looking to the cross.

And I am reminded that God not only *gave* Jesus to us in the manger but He *gave* Him *for* us on the cross. Our earlier reading reminded us that Jesus took on flesh and lived alongside us..... but that flesh would one day be nailed to a cross. Without the cross, the manger scene means very little.

Today, we are grateful that God did not hold back but freely gave His son for us.

What are you like at giving? I guess you will have both received and given gifts this Christmas time. But what are you like in your general, every day giving?

Sometimes we hold onto the things that we consider to be ours. It's something we learn from an early age... "mine!" Have you ever tried to get a toddler to hand over a toy they believe is theirs? Often, the more you try, the tighter they hold! Running the gauntlet would be easier than trying to prise a much loved toy out of a toddler's hand

We too can hold on tightly to what we consider ours. Our careers, our possessions, our resources, our time, our traditions, our ways of working.....

We may know all things belong to God on one hand but that head knowledge doesn't always influence our behaviours.

Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch women who, along with her family helped many Jewish people escape from the Nazi's, is quoted to have said;

"I have learned to hold all things loosely, so God will not have to pry them out of my hands."

Christmas reminds us that God did not hold tightly to Jesus. As close as that eternal relationship was, God freely gave.....knowing all that would mean. Jesus freely chose to take on flesh and live among us; to heal a lost and broken world; to redeem us; to establish a relationship with us, to save us. That's the real gift of Christmas.

And so today, as you ponder the gift of Jesus, the sacrifice God made, the price He paid and what that means for you ,.... perhaps you could also take a few moments to consider whether there are things that you are holding too tightly to? Things that perhaps you don't need to carry with you into 2022

Corrie Ten Boom is also quoted as saying; *"Hold loosely to the things of this life, so that if God requires them of you, it will be easy to let them go."*

Christmastime is a time for giving. Giving is something that is supposed to flow easily from the followers of Jesus.....but does it? Often we have to dig deep; we have to love deeply as God loves us deeply. To be the bearers of the gift of Jesus and the gifts of His love, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation etc, sometimes we have to be prepared to let go of things.....and to not hold so tightly to other things.

Sometimes we need to remember the underlying essence of some of our own traditions rather than holding onto everything to do with that tradition. Sometimes we need to loosen our grip and then we are able to come before God with open hands and say *'take what you want from me and here I am, ready to receive all that you have for me'.....*

Prayer

Thank you Jesus...that you came and you dwelt among us. Thank you that we have been able to pause and ponder the gift You have given to us. Thank you that You were willing to not only come to the manger but go to the cross. Thank you that You gave yourself for us. Help us to not hold too tightly to the things we consider are ours but to come before You with open hands; willing to surrender, willing to give out of all that we have received from You.

Show to us anything that we have made more important than loving and serving You. Develop within us hearts that love deeply and give freely.

We thank You for the many blessings of this season; of times spent with family and friends. We recognise that there is still so much uncertainty around but we acknowledge again today that You are the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords...the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end and we place our hope in You. May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done....Amen.

**Who is he in yonder stall,
At whose feet the shepherds
fall?**

*'Tis the Lord! O wondrous
story,
'Tis the Lord, the King of
Glory!
At his feet we humbly fall,
Crown him, crown him Lord
of all!*

**2. Who is he in deep distress,
Fasting in the wilderness?**

*'Tis the Lord! O wondrous
story,
'Tis the Lord, the King of
Glory!
At his feet we humbly fall,
Crown him, crown him Lord
of all!*

**3. Who is he to whom they
bring
All the sick and sorrowing?**

*'Tis the Lord! O wondrous
story,
'Tis the Lord, the King of
Glory!
At his feet we humbly fall,
Crown him, crown him Lord
of all!*

**4. Who is he on yonder tree
Dies in grief and agony?**

*'Tis the Lord! O wondrous
story,
'Tis the Lord, the King of
Glory!
At his feet we humbly fall,
Crown him, crown him Lord
of all!*

**5. Who is he who from the grave
Comes to succour, help and
save?**

*'Tis the Lord! O wondrous story,
'Tis the Lord, the King of Glory!
At his feet we humbly fall,
Crown him, crown him Lord of
all!*

**6. Who is he whom from his
throne
Rules through all the worlds
alone?**

*'Tis the Lord! O wondrous story,
'Tis the Lord, the King of Glory!
At his feet we humbly fall,
Crown him, crown him Lord of
all!*

Benjamin Russell Hanby

Benediction

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with the flocks, then the work of Christmas begins: To find the lost, to heal those broken in spirit, to feed the hungry, to release the oppressed, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among all peoples, to make a little music with the heart. And to radiate the Light of Christ, every day, in every way, in all that we do and in all that we say. Then the work of Christmas begins. — *Howard Thurman*