



Opening Responses

The eternal Word of God is here –
love now has a human face!

God now dwells with us –
justice now has a human face!

God in Jesus sets us free to really live –
joy now has a human face!

Today is a day for new beginnings –
hope now has a human face!

Let us praise and bless the Lord –
God now has a human face! Alleluia! Amen

Suggested Carol – O Come, All Ye Faithful

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

God of new beginnings,
you took the risk of coming to us
not in splendour in a grand palace,
but as a small baby born in a stable.
We thank you that you love us so much
that you became fully human
and shared our life in all its ups and downs.

Dwell with us once again this day,
as we celebrate together through the gift of technology,
and give you thanks.

Amen

Reading Luke 2:1 – 7

Prayers of Renewal

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
They lived in the shadows, but now light is shining on them.

Let us bring into the light of God the darkness of our lives:

On the thoughts, words and deeds for which we're sorry,
let your light shine.

On the hurts, griefs and burdens we carry,
let your light shine.

On the injustices and inequalities of our broken world,
let your light shine.

On the failings of your Church, and the disunity of your Body,
let your light shine.

On the exploitation of your world, and our lack of care for it,
let your light shine.

God of renewal,
you have broken the yokes that burden your people,
and through your only begotten Son,
called Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace,
you bring justice and peace.
Thank you that you forgive our mistakes, heal our wounds,
and inspire us to live in the light of your love. **Amen**

Suggested Carol – Hark! The Herald-Angels Sing

Reading Luke 2:8 – 14

Reflection

When I was a student in Durham in the snow-covered North East, I once went to the Saturday afternoon shoppers' carol service. It was very popular, and the Cathedral was jampacked. There was a family seated in the pew in front of me, and after we had sung a few carols and the minister in charge of proceedings was leading prayers, one member of that family turned to the woman sat next to him and said, rather loudly, "Why do they have to 'rabbit on' about God? We came here to sing some carols!". At this point, I couldn't help it, and I burst out laughing, meaning that all the people who had turned around to see who had been shouting now glared at me. I decided at that point that it was time to slip out, and go buy a hot chocolate...

While this was a several years back now, this incident that still sticks in my mind, because I think it sums up how many folk feel about this time of year and about coming to church on Christmas morning – it is fine as long as the vicar or the minister does not go on about God! However, despite this state of affairs, I hope that you will permit me a few moments to say something about Christmas and why I believe it matters. I have long been captivated by the thought that, in Jesus, God became fully human because it reflects the value that God puts on not just every person but in everything that God has made. When we take this seriously, it makes a huge difference to how we govern our society, and how we relate to one another. It is a profoundly rich and practical statement to state that Love came down at Christmas, and thus nothing will ever be the same again.

What's more, there is real joy to be found even amid all life's danger and darkness, and it goes much deeper than the cuteness of babies in mangers. Jesus mattered because even in total dependence and

immense vulnerability, he embodied the fullness and freedom of our God. That baby would grow up into the man who showed us what it means to be truly alive, and who would set us free from all that binds us by embracing our world with arms outstretched on the cross. The Church looks toward Easter even as we celebrate Christmas, as the proper significance of the latter becomes clearer when we view it in the light of the former. What's more, that same God is present to us today through the Holy Spirit. In short, Christmas is all about comfort and joy, but it is also true that this can be a difficult season for many. As we come to pray, may we hold in our hearts all for whom 'comfort and joy' are in short supply today, that all people may know the love and freedom of God. Amen

Suggested Carol – Once in Royal David's City

Prayers of Intercession

For those parts of the world caught up in war and conflict,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

For those without clean water to drink or enough to eat,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are homeless, or whose homes are not safe,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are lonely, especially the elderly and poorly,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

For those who will reluctantly spend Christmas alone,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are bereaved, or experiencing other losses,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

For those for whom 'family' is a scary or sad word,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

For those we know who are suffering in mind, body or spirit,
God of hope, **hear our prayer.**

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of hope,
help us to be answers to prayer,
and a people who show the world
what your justice, peace and love look like,
through what we say and how we live.
In Jesus' name, we pray.
Amen

Lord's Prayer

Reading Luke 2:15 – 20

Final Prayer (written by David Adam)

Let us pray:

**We come before the Christ child,
we kneel before the infant,
we adore with the shepherds,
we worship with the wise men,
we love him with Mary and Joseph,
we wonder at the Word made flesh,
we bow before the mystery,
we sing 'glory to God' with the angels.
We will travel this day rejoicing,
glorifying and praising God. Amen**

Suggested Carol – Joy to the World

Blessing

Go in the light of faith and shine boldly.
Go in the strength of faith and be bold.
Go with the blessing of God the Father,
the peace of Jesus the Son,
and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen