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

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**

Suggested Carol – O Come, All Ye Faithful

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   John 1:1 – 14

Reflection

In my view, today's reading is both the most important and the most beautiful in the Bible, because it points to the most spectacular truth. In Jesus Christ, the maker of heaven and earth became fully human and shared our life, showing up in our neighbourhood and revealing the height and depth and breadth of God's love. This points towards the value of everything God has made, and it illustrates how 'matter matters'. By becoming flesh and blood, fully human and truly divine, Jesus Christ reveals just how much God loves all humanity, without exception, and indeed how much God loves the entirety of creation. This means that as we celebrate the birth of God's Son, we discover both reassurance and challenge. Reassurance, because whenever we find ourselves doubting that we are lovable, God reminds us that we are infinitely precious and worthwhile. Challenge, because these things being true for me and for you means they are also true for all people and for the natural world, which places a responsibility upon us to respond accordingly by becoming people of love and light.

Our passage talks a lot about light. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome the light. In an older translation, the darkness cannot *understand* the light, cannot make sense of the outrageous love of God poured out for all to see and touch and hear and smell. Being a people of love sometimes runs against the grain. In Matthew's Gospel, we learn that Jesus' family were forced to flee to Egypt, to escape the wrath of the tyrannical King Herod, meaning that 'God in human form' was a refugee. Yet, the inhumanity shown to those seeking sanctuary in this country in the past year illustrates how far we have to go to building a world of love and light. Darkness cannot and will not overcome the light, but it does not mean that the darkness is not real or not harmful. That is why we need to embrace the challenge of Christmas, as well as the reassurance.

When we do this by placing our trust in Jesus Christ, as our passage goes onto say, we become children of God and take our place within the community of God. In other words, we both embrace God's love for ourselves, and commit ourselves to loving others and taking care of God's world. Being a child of God means valuing the same things that God values, with the same passion. The birth of Jesus reminds us that God in human form embraced vulnerability and dependence by being born in a backwater of the Roman Empire, in the humblest

of conditions, to parents without power or status. When the Word of God became flesh and lived among us, it meant that God embraced the risks of love, for the sake of love. May we have enough courage to take holy risks too, embracing the reassurance and challenge of truly being children of God. Amen

Suggested Carol – Once in Royal David's City

Prayers of Intercession

> God of hope, we bring our prayers for others to you:
> 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**.
>
> 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

Final Prayer (written by David Adam)

> **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