

# The Crib Service

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

24<sup>th</sup> December, 2015

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### *Introduction*

The story of Christmas is well known and well loved. This evening as we think again about Jesus' birth some 2,000 years ago, as we sing some familiar carols, as we place the figures on the altar, let us also see those familiar events unfold through the eyes of Matthew, Luke and John. But first let us pray.

### *Bidding prayer*

May we this Christmas prepare to hear again in word and song the glad tidings of God's redeeming love made real to us in the birth of the Holy Child of Bethlehem and with the angelic host, let us give glory to God in the highest.

But first let us pray for the needs of the whole world: for peace and good will among all nations; for unity and brotherhood within the Christian Church especially here in Dinard and in the Diocese of Europe; for love and harmony in our community, our family and our home; and for blessing on everyone who is special to us, especially those we miss.

Let us remember people who find Christmas difficult: the poor and homeless; the hungry and sick; and those who mourn the loss of a loved one.

Lastly, we remember with thanks those we loved who have died but now rejoice with us on another shore in the light of God's heavenly kingdom.

These prayers we offer to God the Father in the power of God the Holy Spirit by saying the prayer which God the Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, has taught us:-

*The Lord's Prayer*

*Carol 1      403    Once in Royal David's city (verses 1 - 3, 5)*

(during which the animals are brought up)

*In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came to her and said, 'Greetings, o favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But Mary was much perplexed by his words so the angel said to her, 'Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.' Mary replied, 'How can this be since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Then Mary said, 'Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Be it to me according to your word.' Then the angel Gabriel departed from her.*



There are two annunciations: one to Mary and one to Joseph. In the first, it is midday when the Archangel Gabriel appears out-of-the-blue to Mary. Mary is only a young girl but she is still old enough to be engaged to marry her fiancé, Joseph the carpenter. Mary is at home in Nazareth, busy doing ordinary jobs, perhaps preparing the family meal for her mother, Ann, and her father, Joachim. The thought of seeing an angel, of hearing an angel speak to her, must have been beyond her wildest dreams. Understandably, the presence of an angel and what he has to say to her, disturbs her. How can she, a simple Jewish girl, have found favour in the sight of God? How could she, a virgin, who has never known a man, conceive a child? But Gabriel may well have smiled encouragingly at her when he tells her not to be afraid. He tells her that with God everything is possible, that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Most High will overshadow her and she will conceive a boy, a son whom she and Joseph must name Jesus. Mary may

only be a young girl but she has the courage to say yes to the angel, to say that she is willing to do whatever God wants her to do for him.

So it is and so it will be.



*Carol 2      51   Away in a manger*

(during which the figures of Mary and Joseph are brought up)

## **Part 2                      Matthew 1 v18 – 21, 24**

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife.*



The second annunciation was to Joseph. Joseph was not a happy man. He loved Mary. They were engaged to be married. But his world collapsed around him when he found out that she was already pregnant. He knew her child could not be his because they had not slept together. What was he to do ? He was a good man. He loved her. He didn't want to hurt her. But how could he marry Mary if she had already been unfaithful to him ? He must have had many a sleepless

night wrestling with the problem till at last he resolved to break off their engagement quietly so as not cause a public scandal. At last, his mind made up, Joseph could sleep. But in his deep, exhausted sleep, Joseph dreamed an angel came to speak to him. Gabriel told him the facts. Mary was not untrue to him. There was no other man in her life. Their child would be special – he was God’s child and Joseph was to be the boy’s step father by marrying Mary and by naming the child Jesus. Joseph’s dream was no longer a nightmare but the reality he really wanted: he could in good faith now marry the girl he loved.

He woke up and he did.



**Carol 3      444   Silent night**

(during which the figure of Jesus is brought up)

**Part 3                      Luke 2 v1 – 7**

*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 Judea, 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 bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*



There was no room in the inn. But what were Mary and Joseph doing in Bethlehem in the first place needing somewhere to stay? The answer – bureaucracy. The Romans were organised. The Romans taxed people who lived in their Empire. To help them know who to tax, they held a regular census, requiring folk to return to their home town to be counted ! That’s why Joseph had to leave Nazareth to travel some 80 miles south to Bethlehem. That’s why Joseph took Mary with him even though she was heavily pregnant – they would cope, somehow !

And, of course, they did. There were plenty of places to stay on the way but in Bethlehem, the number of travellers squashed into town meant there was no room in the inn. By now Mary was desperate. She had to have somewhere to have the baby so a stable with its manger was found – probably, in the end, a much more quiet, private place than in the noise and bustle of a public inn.

There was no room in the inn but there was in the stable.



*Carol 4      554   While shepherds watched*

(during which the figures of the shepherds are brought up)

## **Part 4                      Luke 2 v8 – 16**

*In that region, there were shepherds 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 good 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 bands of cloth 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 on earth peace among those whom he favours”*

*When the angel had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go now to Bethlehem to see the thing that has taken place which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in a manger.*



It wasn't what they were expecting. Keeping watch over their flock by night normally isn't that much of a problem for a good shepherd. Perhaps an occasional nocturnal predator looking for a bite to eat but nothing unusual; nothing out of the ordinary. Except, of course, that night there was – an angel and an angelic choir telling them of a strange birth, the birth of the long-expected Messiah. So the shepherds left their sheep and went in haste to see for themselves and they found things just as the angel had told them: a baby wrapped in strips of cotton cloth and lying in a manger. Whether the shepherds left a lamb with Mary and Joseph as a present, a token of their respect, their congratulations, we can't be sure. But what we can be sure of is that Mary pondered what they told her in her heart.

And, like the little lamb he was, Jesus slept in peace.



***Carol 5      537   We three kings***

(during which the figures of the Wise Men are brought up)

## Part 5

## Matthew 2 v1 – 11 (edited)

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened. Calling together the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "According to the prophets, in Bethlehem of Judea." Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." They set out and there ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*



Jesus was already born. The first time that the new star rose in the East was not a prophecy but a record of what had already happened – a great king had been born. The wise men were astronomers who knew the map of the stars by heart and they could tell what they observed was a significant new phenomenon moving through the night sky. The star led them to Jerusalem where Herod told them to go to Bethlehem. They did and again they were led by the star to the house where Jesus, Mary and Joseph were staying. They went in and paid their respects to the baby boy giving him their three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

King Herod was frightened of this unknown child who had been born to be king of the Jews. Herod was trying to use the wise men to find the baby so that he could

have him killed. Herod did not want any rival to his throne and he was prepared to kill to keep his kingdom.

Needless-to-say, the wise men went home without telling Herod who and what they had found.



*Carol 6      199    Hark the Herald*

## **Part 6      John 1 v1 – 5, 14**

*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have beheld his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*



Imagine being in the dark. Imagine what it's like to be in the pitch-dark, complete blackness; your bedroom at night, for example, with the shutters closed and no light on in your room, not even the glow from a clock. The darkness before Creation was something like this only deeper, darker, more profound. But Jesus, the Son of God, was already there alongside God the Father and God the Holy Spirit; Jesus was already there with God before Creation. It was Jesus, the Word of God, who brought the universe into being through speaking

the word of power: 'Let there be light' – 'Fiat lux'. And there was light as Jesus, the light of the world, brought light into the darkness of non-existence. And from the light of God, which the darkness could never extinguish, came new life.

So Jesus was born. So Jesus, God's son, was born into the world he created, he was born of Mary in the stable of an inn in Bethlehem, the little child like we all once were. And Christians like Matthew and Luke and John, whose stories about Jesus' birth we have just heard, experienced the glory of Jesus first-hand and in their gospels, they tell us about it.

This Christmas, every Christmas, Jesus shines out as a light in a dark world to brighten our lives.



### *Prayers*

Lord, help us to approach the Christmas story  
with a fresh sense of wonder as we think of Jesus,  
the Son of God yet born of Mary;  
the incarnate word, yet a child without speech;  
The Lord of Glory, yet a baby cradled in a manger,  
Thank you Lord for your gift beyond words,  
Amen.

Lord, we know the Christmas story so well.  
Help us to understand it better.  
Make it more real to us  
so that with Mary and Joseph, we may journey in faith to Bethlehem;  
with the shepherds, we may hear again the good tidings of a Saviour's birth;  
and with the angels we may glorify your holy name.  
Give us a new joy in our worship this Christmas  
And fill our hearts with wonder, love and praise,

Amen

Loving Father, as we thank you for the joy we feel this Christmas,  
let us not forget those less fortunate:  
those who are worried or ill;  
those without a job or without enough money to cope;  
those who are on their own or those who are sad that someone they love has died.  
May they find strength and comfort in the fact of Christmas  
that by your birth in Bethlehem you became poor  
that we might possess true riches.  
Amen.

***Blessing***

God our Father,  
whose light was born a child in Bethlehem,  
through our faith, may that light give light to our hearts  
and shine through our deeds.  
And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and those you love  
now, at this Christmastide, and forever,  
Amen.

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