

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Christmas Day 2022

The Rev'd Dr
Alex Clare Young

Scripture Sentences from Psalm 96

O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy!

Call To Worship

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas - **we come to worship!**
Soon the bells will start - **we come to let our prayers ring out!**
And the thing that'll make 'em ring is the carol that you sing -
we come to sing our praises!
Right within your heart - **we come to ponder, deep in our hearts.**

based on It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas, Meredith Wilson, 1951

Prayers of Approach, Confession and a Declaration/Assurance of Forgiveness

So this is Christmas **and what have we done?**
God we thank you for the year that is ending, **and for the one just beginning.**
And so this is Christmas **we thank you for fun**
with near and with dear ones **with old and with young.**
As we meet you in this space, **we let go of fear,**
We draw near to you, **we wait for peace...**

So this is Christmas and yet we still live in a world
where the strong exploit the weak,
where the rich ones snatch wealth from the poor ones,
where the words "War is over if you want it, war is over now"
ring with challenge, rather than peace

God forgive us. **God forgive us.**
Christ child forgive us. **Christ child forgive us.**
Spirit of change, transform us. **Spirit of change, transform us.**

God's peace is not the easy peace,
but Christ's gift to us is that peace is within grasp,
as we hear that good news,
we yearn to be part of the change we seek. **Amen.**

*with resonance from Happy Xmas (War is Over)
by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, 1971*

A Prayer for Illumination

God, you let go of majesty,
humbled yourself to draw near,
cried with the screams of the newborn,
reached out, to wrap your tiny fists around our outstretched fingers.
Help us to let go, humble us, hear our cries, stretch our minds,
as we open the gifts of your Word, Amen.

Readings

Isaiah 9:2-7 | St Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

Sermon Notes

Questions from Scripture

Isaiah

- What would it look like for folks here, today, to have 'joy as if at the harvest'? Themes of food waste, lack of workers, and cost of living crisis come to mind.
- How might we break the yoke of oppression for others today?
- How might we live out the call to peace that is embodied in the Christ child, recognising that peace is neither easy nor simple?

Luke

- How can we help to ensure that there is room at the inn? (Consider telling stories of those who have hosted refugee families).
- How might we better act like angels, bringing good news to folks in words that bring hope, rather than fear?
- The Gospels suggest that shepherds - ordinary, smelly night-workers with little power - were the first invited to meet Christ. What might we learn from this? Who would you like to journey alongside through the coming year? (Link to unions, strikes, unequal pay etc)
- What are you pondering in your heart today?

Secular and Sacred

At Christmas I often notice a sense, amongst Christians, that there is a divide, or a competition, between secular and sacred, that is witnessed in the shopping and partying, the good food and gifts. But I feel that that is an inaccurate portrayal of what is happening. The joy of giving, spending time with chosen family, volunteering to help those who are isolated, singing carols together - to me, Christmas is the one time at which vast numbers of folks join in sharing the Good News of love and the gap between secular and sacred - if such a gap exists - is at its most narrow.

Each year, then, I seek to incorporate contemporary (ish!) culture into the Christmas service, as I am aware that there will likely be guests sharing in worship. This year, I've been reflecting on the way in which Christmas songs reflect the Gospel message. Check out these lyrics for a starter. As you will see, to me, they fit well with the questions scripture has suggested, above. Consider structuring your sermon around these songs. I've used them as hooks for the prayers, too.

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas by Meredith Wilson (1951)

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas
Soon the bells will start
And the thing that'll make 'em ring is the carol that you sing
Right within your heart

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas
Toys in every store
But the prettiest sight to see is the holly that will be
On your own front door

How can we help to ensure that there is room at the inn? (Consider telling stories of those who have hosted refugee families).

How might we better act like angels, bringing good news to folks in words that bring hope, rather than fear?

Happy Xmas: War is Over by John Lennon and Yoko Ono (1971)

So this is Christmas (War is over)
And what have we done? (If you want it)
Another year over (War is over)
And a new one just begun (Now)
And so Happy Christmas (War is over)
We hope you have fun (If you want it)
The near and the dear ones (War is over)
The old and the young (Now)

How might we break the yoke of oppression for others today?

How might we live out the call to peace that is embodied in the Christ child, recognising that peace is neither easy nor simple?

River: Joni Mitchell (1971)

It's coming on Christmas
They're cutting down trees
They're putting up reindeer
And singing songs of joy and peace
Oh, I wish I had a river
I could skate away on

What would it look like for folks here, today, to have 'joy as if at the harvest'? Themes of food waste, lack of workers, and cost of living crisis come to mind.

All I want for Christmas is you: Mariah Carey & Walter Afanasieff (1994)

I don't want a lot for Christmas
There is just one thing I need
I don't care about the presents underneath the Christmas tree
I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
All I want for Christmas is you

The Gospels suggest that shepherds - ordinary, smelly night-workers with little power - were the first invited to meet Christ. What might we learn from this? Who would you like to journey alongside through the coming year? (Link to unions, strikes, unequal pay etc)

What are you pondering in your heart today?

Prayers of Intercessions

It's coming on Christmas, they're cutting down trees, they're putting up reindeer and singing songs of joy and peace. Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on...

God, sometimes the outstretched arms of the world
make us simply want to skate away,
and yet, you are in the trees starved of oxygen and the rivers full of plastic.

Our gift to you is love, Your gift to us is grace.

Hear our prayers. **Hear our prayers.**

God, sometimes the outstretched arms of the world
make us simply want to skate away,
and yet, you are in the tears of those who mourn and yearn,
the hands of those with nothing to spare,
the bodies of those who live and love expansively,
and the scars of those we don't yet understand.

Our gift to you is love, Your gift to us is grace.
Hear our prayers. **Hear our prayers.**

God, sometimes the outstretched arms of the world
make us simply want to skate away,
and yet, you are in each of us, in our flesh, in our thoughts,
in our fears and hopes, and in our actions...

Our gift to you is love, Your gift to us is grace.
Hear our prayers. **Hear our prayers.**

This Christmas, instead of skating away, may we skate towards a new world,
where we, Christ's hands, save the earth,
where we, Christ's feet, journey with the unloved,
where we, Christ's people, join in Christ's work.
In Jesus's name we pray, **Amen**

Offertory

This is a season of giving. Let's take a moment to commit our time, our talents, and our treasure to God's work.

God, giver of good gifts, thank you for the joy of giving. We commit our gifts to you, that they might be used to do your will. Amen.

A Blessing

All I want for Christmas is you!
Go with love and laughter, go with ponderings and words of love,
go with joy to live out peace, and know that the blessing of God:
the blessing of the One in Three
who yearns, who births, and who is born,
Is with you this Christmas. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
O Come All Ye Faithful	160	306	212	491
Hark! The Herald Angels	159	301	202	211
While Shepherds	155	296	221	764
Who would think (Scarlet Ribbons)	178	295	222	
Bleak Midwinter	162	305	204	337
Joy to the World	135	320	330	393

RS – Rejoice & Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise