



## **Call to Worship**

Hear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
**you that led Joseph like a flock;**  
Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim,  
**before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.**  
Stir up your mighty strength  
**and come to our salvation.**  
Turn us again, O God;  
**show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.**

*Psalm 80*

## **Words of Welcome**

Sisters and brothers let us gather this morning in the presence of our shepherd,  
in anticipation of salvation and to see the light through the darkness. Let us pray:

Illuminating God, be with us this day,  
shine your countenance on this service,  
bless us with your love and give us hope in these uncertain times, Amen

## **Prayers of Adoration and Confession, Assurance of Pardon**

God of patience and kindness  
the world was dark, and you gave it light.  
The world was barren, and you gave it life  
The world was cruel and unjust  
and yet you still loved all that lived in it.  
We praise you for coming close to us,  
for living among us, for being Emmanuel and giving us hope when we needed it.

But Lord, sometimes we know we can exhaust you.  
We cannot express to you how we feel.

We cannot speak to you,  
and we forget that we need you.

Sometimes we are like Joseph  
good people, trying to do the best by others  
but we get it wrong because we don't listen,  
relying on outside voices rather than your Word,  
believing half-truths, and rumours rather than what you tell us to be true.

Forgive us our neglect of you.  
Forgive us when you draw near to us and we turn our backs.  
Help us to find your voice, your light, your presence  
through all the noise of this modern age.

We ask this in the name of your son, Emmanuel,  
who was born, was crucified and rose again to be with us always. Amen

## Prayer of Assurance

Sisters and brothers, Paul wrote to the early Church in Rome  
telling them that all people sin, all fall short of the glory of God,  
but all are made right in his sight, through Christ Jesus.  
Know and believe you are forgiven and you are loved. Amen

## Prayer of Illumination

Lord you are from the lineage of David,  
who once hoped that his song would be favourable to you  
and whose words we use today.  
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen

## Readings

*Isaiah 7:10-16 | St Matthew 1:18-25*

## All Age Activity

What's in a name?

Spend some time discussing what the meaning of your first and last names mean.

For example, Mark Rodgers is literally “God of war - Son of Rodger”

It’s nearly right, I’m son of Raymond. Does your name accurately represent you?

Some clues - Any surname with an S at the end means son of: Williams, Jones, Hughes etc. Many surnames that start with P with a Welsh origin also means son of: Parry (Ap Harry), Pugh (Ap Hugh), Prichard (easy that one!). Discuss any names where their meaning has been given in the Bible, either a person or a place name. How many can you remember?

What about the popularity of names over the ages? Can you think of any names that are not in fashion anymore? (Stanley, Cecil etc). Any that are dying out? (Gary?) Any that have come back? Compare that with the meaning of Immanuel. The name may not be popular as a baby’s name, but the meaning has universal presence.

## Sermon Notes

### *Isaiah*

This reading is taken from the first part of Isaiah, when the original prophet was warning about God’s displeasure with his people and the consequences that could happen. This is before many went into exile whilst the next two parts were much later after the exile. They speak of hope for the people. But there are glimpses of hope hinted at here, none more so than with the mention of a virgin’s birth and his name Immanuel. Is the prophet looking into the near future? Or is he writing about 700 years later? The kingdom of Israel had already adopted the saying “God is with us” and they were a key player in trying to pressure Judah into an alliance. Having a King called Immanuel would certainly give the people of Judah hope. Or is it more long term than this?

### *St Matthew 1:18-25*

In this reading the writer takes the verses out of Isaiah and applies them to the message given to Joseph by the angel of the Lord. But in the New Testament reading we not only hear one name but two, Immanuel and Jesus - “God is with us” and “God to the rescue”. Perhaps it would be interesting to explore these two names. Who is God with? Why? Who needs rescuing from whom? It is also interesting to note that the term for virgin in Isaiah has a slightly different connotation to that in Matthew, with Matthew being more like our understanding of the word, and Isaiah’s virgin being a young woman ready to be betrothed, rather than one who has had no sexual contact.

## *Bringing Together*

Although scholars can argue about the validity of the prophecy it is worth considering whether God is speaking and continues to speak to people from different times, with the same or similar words. Ultimately it does not matter whether Isaiah meant his prophecy to be short or long term and whether Matthew manipulated the verses. What matters is the universal truth of “God is with us” and that in both books Immanuel holds true, and both prophecies came true. What can these verses mean to us as a world in the future? What other truths will be revealed to us?

## Prayers of Intercession

God of love,  
we come to you now with our thoughts for the world,  
our communities and churches, and for each other.

We name to you today the worries we have for creation,  
the more extreme weather conditions  
and the effect this has on your people, our neighbours.  
Give us hope of realistic solutions.  
Help each of us to play our part in the healing process,  
and give help to those displaced or disadvantaged because of it.

Lord your name speaks out; **God be with us**

Lord, we name to you our anxieties for what is happening in the world.  
The great damage on people’s lives through war and violence,  
the uncertainties of politics played out on our televisions and on social media,  
the hatred that is spouted towards people who are classed as “other”.  
Let your love shine through so victims and perpetrators can know peace.

Lord your name cries out: **God be with us**

Father, we hear so much about what is wrong about this country,  
but we know that there is so much good work going on in your name.  
But they are up against it, physically, economically and emotionally.  
Help them to be strong, help them to continue serving you  
and fighting for those most in need.

Lord your name shouts out, **God be with us**

God we think of those that we know,  
those of us in our church communities  
that find they cannot leave the house anymore and join us,  
those who we know in our neighbourhoods who are suffering at this time of year,  
the families that can't afford Christmas  
and our friends and family who are not in the best state of health at the moment.

Lord your name reaches out, **God be with us**

Lord, be with all those who will be working unseen this Christmas time  
to keep us safe and healthy,  
all those travelling to see family and friends,  
and all those who have no one this year.  
In Christ's name we ask this. Amen  
And now we bring all our prayers together,  
gift wrapped in the word Jesus taught his disciples, saying... **Our Father...**

## Offertory

Generous God  
You gave the ultimate gift of your Son,  
given out of love for humankind,  
so that we may be close to you once more.  
Accept our gifts today,  
so that we can pass on that love to others,  
to bring the Good News to all that need it. Amen.

## Blessing

May the blessing of God fall upon you;  
may the Good News of Christ's arrival flow from you;  
and may the gifts of the Spirit be the best present you receive this week. Amen

| Hymn Suggestions                               |     |     |     |      |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|
|                                                | RS  | CH4 | StF | MP   |
| O come, O come, Emmanuel                       | 126 | 273 | 180 | 493  |
| Long ago, prophets knew                        |     |     | 178 |      |
| How sweet the name of Jesus sounds             | 277 | 461 | 322 | 251  |
| Holy is our God / Lift us his name             |     |     |     | 1326 |
| (O) Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness | 187 | 201 | 34  | 529  |
| Love divine, all loves excelling               | 663 | 519 | 503 | 449  |
| The Lord will come and not be slow             | 128 |     |     |      |
| There's a light upon the mountains             |     |     | 188 | 679  |
| Come and join the celebration                  | 166 | 321 | 196 | 83   |
| Behold the mountain of the Lord                | 130 | 715 |     |      |
| Where is this stupendous stranger?             | 174 |     |     |      |
| Let earth and heaven combine                   | 190 |     | 208 |      |
| From heaven you came                           | 522 | 374 | 272 | 162  |
| The race that long in darkness pined           | 129 | 290 |     |      |
| O Little Town of Bethlehem                     | 145 | 304 | 213 | 503  |
| Child in the Manger                            | 150 | 314 |     | 71   |

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

You may want to listen to Joseph's Song by Michael Card during the service. It can be accessed here - [Joseph's Song - Michael Card - lyrics & fine art](#) Or Joseph's lullaby by Mercy Me - [Mercy Me - Joseph's Lullaby \(Lyrics\)](#)