worship notes
from the United Reformed Church

Christmas Day 2026
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The Good News Has Feet – The Word Has Flesh – God Comes

Call to Worship

On this Christmas morning,
we come again to wonder at the mystery of God:
the Word has become flesh and has made his home among us.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The child born in Bethlehem is Emmanuel — God with us.

Good news of great joy is given to all people:
to us is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.

So come, let us worship the God who does not remain distant, but comes close;
God who takes flesh, shares our humanity, and makes a home among us.
Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace!

Let us worship God.

Prayer of Adoration, Confession, Assurance of Pardon

Living God, on this Christmas morning
we come again to the mystery at the heart of our faith:
the Word became flesh and lived among us.
You did not love the world from a distance.
You came among us — small enough to be held,
vulnerable enough to need care, ordinary enough to be overlooked.

In Jesus, you entered the mess and beauty of human life.
You knew family and friendship, joy and sorrow,
welcome and rejection, ter and tears.
And so we praise you for love made flesh,
for grace with a human face,
for light which comes into our darkness and refuses to be extinguished.

Yet, loving God, we confess that we do not always recognise you.

We look for you in power and miss you in vulnerability.
We search for you in the extraordinary
and fail to notice you in the ordinary.
We sing of peace while holding tightly to old hurts.
We celebrate generosity while protecting what is ours.
We rejoice that you came among us
yet sometimes fail to recognise you in those who stand beside us.

Forgive us.

Open our eyes again to the wonder of the incarnation:
that in Jesus Christ you have bound yourself to humanity
and shown us what love looks like when love takes flesh.
Receive us as we are, renew us by your grace,
and shape us into people in whom your love may also become visible.
For the Word has become flesh and dwells among us,
full of grace and truth. Amen.

Hear the good news of Christmas:
the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.
God has not come into the world to condemn us, but to bring us life.
In Jesus Christ, God comes close to us as we are -
with mercy greater than our failure, grace deeper than our sin,
and love from which nothing can separate us.
So hear and believe the good news:
in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, renewed and set free to begin again.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer for Illumination

Living God, the Word became flesh and lived among us.
As we hear the words of Scripture,
open our ears to hear your voice, our minds to understand your truth,
and our hearts to recognise Christ among us.
May your written Word lead us again to the living Word,
Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth. Amen.

Readings

Isaiah 52:7–10 | *St John 1:1–14*

All Age Activities

These resources, prepared in 2024 by the URC Youth and Children's team explore today's Gospel reading. https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-December-2024-Week-5-.pdf

Sermon Notes

Central message: Christmas is not simply the remembrance of Jesus' birth. It is the extra ordinary claim that God enters our world as it is, bringing the possibility of new creation, hope and peace. And if God's Word becomes flesh, our words must become actions.

1. John tells Christmas differently

No angels, shepherds, star, magi or manger. John takes us back to Genesis: "In the beginning…" In Genesis, God speaks and creation happens. Light emerges from darkness; order from chaos. John announces another act of creation: "In the beginning was the Word." The Greek logos – word, speech, reason, God's self-expression. Human language can speak of God but never fully contain God. Key point: Christmas is not simply about a birth. It is about the Creator entering creation

2. The Word becomes flesh – God comes among us

"The Word became flesh and lived among us." (John 1:14) Literally, God pitches a tent among us. God moves into the neighbourhood. God does not dismiss human existence but embraces it. The eternal becomes particular; the Creator becomes part of the created order. God has always been involved in human history through covenant, law and prophets, but now comes in flesh. Key phrase: God does not save from a safe distance. God comes.

3. Isaiah – the good news has feet

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace." (Isaiah 52:7) Isaiah addresses people experiencing exile, destruction and displacement. Jerusalem is in ruins. The people wait for hope. A messenger comes announcing peace, salvation and God's reign. Not Babylon, not the emperor, not military power. God reigns. The watchmen begin to sing even before the messenger arrives. God's comfort is not simply reassurance. God returns to the people. Connection between Isaiah and John: Isaiah's good news has feet. John's Word has flesh. Isaiah announces God's return. John tells us God has come among us. Key point: The good news does not remain an announcement. It becomes a presence.

4. Christmas is about new creation – including ours

"To all who received him… he gave power to become children of God." (John 1:12) God is still bringing light into darkness and life into places of despair. Christmas is not only about Jesus' birth but about our new birth. Our identity as children of God is not dependent on ancestry, status or achievement. God draws us into God's life. Key phrase: Christmas is not simply Jesus' birthday. In John's telling, perhaps it is ours as well. New creation means new possibility.

5. If God's Word becomes flesh, what about our words?

Churches are very good at words: preaching, writing, debating, making declarations. We speak about justice, poverty, inclusion, peace and solidarity. But what happens when those words acquire flesh? Solidarity must eventually stand somewhere, alongside someone. Examples from John's Gospel Judas speaks about concern for the poor, but his words and actions do not match (John 12). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, lays down his life for the sheep (John 10). The risen Jesus shows Thomas his wounded hands and side (John 20). Key challenge: It is possible to say all the right things while remaining safely distant from those about whom we speak. Incarnation does not allow us that luxury. Two questions: John asks: What are we creating with our words? Isaiah asks: Where are our words taking us? Christian discipleship needs both words and feet.

6. Hope among the ruins

"Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem." (Isaiah 52:9) The ruins are still ruins. The damage has not disappeared. Yet, among the ruins, a song begins. Christmas does not make suffering, war, grief or uncertainty disappear. Some will celebrate amid conflict, displacement, loneliness or loss. Christian joy does not require us to pretend everything is well. God's peace, shalom, is about the restoration and flourishing of life. Key point: God does not wait until the ruins have been rebuilt before coming. God comes into our unfinished, wounded and uncertain lives. Christian hope is not denial of suffering. It is the conviction that suffering and abandonment do not have the final word.

7. The tiny feet in the manger

Return to Isaiah's image of the messenger's feet. Luke gives us the stable, manger and child. John tells us what it means: the Word became flesh. The Creator becomes a child who must be held. The giver of life becomes dependent upon others for warmth, food and protection. Tiny hands. Tiny feet. The connection: Isaiah sees the beautiful feet of the messenger carrying good news. At Bethlehem, the good news has feet too – the feet of a child who cannot yet walk. Those feet will one day carry Jesus: Along dusty roads, into villages and homes. Towards people others avoid. To tables where the wrong people have been invited. Towards the sick, grieving and marginalised. Eventually towards Jerusalem and the cross. But not yet. For now, they are simply the feet of a baby lying in a manger.

Key phrase: This is how God comes. Not as an idea or theological proposition, but in flesh. Small enough to be held. Vulnerable enough to need care.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, who created all that is
and whose love will not let creation go.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
God with us, born among us and sharing fully in our humanity.
In him, light shines in the darkness,
grace meets us where we are, and love is made visible.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who breathes life into God's people
and calls us to make Christ's love known.

We believe that God is still with us, still at work among us,
and that the darkness will not overcome the light.

This is our faith. This is our hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God who comes among us, on this Christmas Day
we pray for your world and for all those whose lives feel far removed
from the peace and joy of which we sing.
The Word became flesh and lived among us.

So we pray for places where human flesh is wounded by war,
where children are afraid, where families are divided,
where homes have been destroyed
and where peace seems impossibly far away.
Prince of Peace, come close.

We pray for those for whom Christmas is not an easy day:
those who are grieving, those who are lonely,
those who are anxious about what lies ahead;
those sitting beside an empty chair,
and those longing for a phone call, a visit,
or simply the assurance that they have not been forgotten.
God with us, come close.

We pray for those who are hungry,
those without a safe place to call home,
those struggling with the cost of simply living,

and those whose lives are hidden from the celebrations around them.
May our celebration of the child of Bethlehem
make us more attentive to those for whom there is still no room.
God of compassion, come close.

We pray for your Church.
Do not let us keep Christmas safely contained
in carols, candles and familiar words.
If the Word has become flesh, then faith must take flesh too:
in kindness offered, in forgiveness begun, in injustice challenged,
in strangers welcomed, in generosity practised, and in love made real.

May the worship we have shared become service.
May the carols we have sung become hope.
May the gifts we have exchanged make us more generous.
May the candles we have lit remind us to carry your light
into places of darkness.
May the people with whom we have gathered
teach us again the preciousness of one another.

And when Christmas is over, when the decorations are put away
and ordinary life begins again, do not let us put away its truth:
that you have come among us;
that the Word has become flesh;
that light shines in the darkness;
and that, in Jesus Christ, you have made your home with us.

May that good news live in us and through us,
today and in all the days to come.
In the name of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, we pray. Amen.

Offertory

Loving God, you sent your only Son to live among us,
bringing us your grace and truth.
All we have to offer is what you have given us in manger and cross.
Receive all that we have
and all that we are to your glory and for your service,
in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Blessing

May the God who comes among us
meet you in the reality of your life.

May Christ, the Word made flesh,
give flesh to your hope, courage to your love,
and feet to the good news you carry.

May your feet take you towards those who need peace,
towards those who need hope, towards those who need to know
that they are not alone.

And as you go, may you discover that God has gone before you,
walks beside you, and makes a home among us still.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you and those whom you love,
this Christmas Day and always. Amen.