

Daily Devotions  
*from the United Reformed Church*

Advent Hymns and Carols 3



Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December – Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> December

#### Introduction

Over the Advent and Christmas season we will look at various hymns and carols associated with this time of year and reflect on them and the Biblical stories they relate to. We hope that, in these strange times, a feast of music will help lift our spirits.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December - Gabriel's Message .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Monday 21st December Ave Maria.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Tuesday 22nd December - Masters in This Hall .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Wednesday 23rd December - The Cherry Tree Carol.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Thursday 24th December - Hark the Herald Angels Sing .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Friday 25th December - While Shepherds Watched their Flocks By Night.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Saturday 26th December - Good King Wenceslas.....</b>	<b>20</b>

### Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December - Gabriel's Message

Fay Rowland, graduate researcher Wesley House, Cambridge, member  
Christ the King, Kettering

This simple Basque carol tells the story of the Annunciation.

St Luke 1 26-38

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 he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, 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 to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son;

the walk and talk the talk but I am certain that if I tread in the footsteps of the Master I will be led in the right direction.

Prayer

When we forget to be generous – remind us of our riches  
When we see hunger and thirst – show us your face  
When we are tired and can't go on –  
refresh us with the encouragement of your Spirit  
When we lose our way through the mist of uncertainty –  
guide our steps on the right path  
Strengthen our determination to follow where you lead,  
for Christ's sake. Amen

5: "Sire, the night is darker now  
And the wind blows stronger  
Fails my heart, I know not how,  
I can go no longer."  
"Mark my footsteps, my good page  
Tread thou in them boldly  
Thou shalt find the winter's rage  
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

6: In his master's steps he trod  
Where the snow lay dinted  
Heat was in the very sod  
Which the Saint had printed  
Therefore, Christian men, be sure  
Wealth or rank possessing  
Ye who now will bless the poor  
Shall yourselves find blessing

## Reflection

The hymn 'Good King Wenceslas' is incredibly evocative for me and comes to mind quite frequently when walking on the Lakeland fells in the mist or rain or snow at any time of the year. I am not a map reader, nor have a good sense of direction, so I usually find myself following in the footsteps of my walking companion and quite literally stepping in the prints he's made in the mud or snow. I often burst into this song as I picture that page boy trying to keep up with the determination of the good king wanting to show his generosity of spirit – just on this special day of Christmas - to those he sees suffering in poverty and to whom he feels a sense of responsibility.

Christmas does that to us, doesn't it? It is a time when we show our generosity – not only in response to folk who have kindly given us an unexpected gift, but we also find that perhaps it's a time to give a bit more to charity – perhaps to ease our conscience over spending all that money on food and drink.....

Or is it because we wish to see the justice of God prevail as in the scene of the heavenly banquet when those who cared for the hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned and strangers are recognised and welcomed into the kingdom? And not only at Christmas.

I am always grateful that when I can't see where I'm going on the hills I have someone to follow and so too in my life as a disciple. I try to walk

and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her

## Gabriel's Message

Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

This can be heard here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF2BzUDeTkY>

1. The angel Gabriel from heaven came  
His wings as drifted snow his eyes as flame  
"All hail" said he "thou lowly maiden Mary,  
Most highly favoured lady," Gloria!

2. "For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,  
All generations laud and honour thee,  
Thy Son shall be Emanuel, by seers foretold  
Most highly favoured lady," Gloria!

3. Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head  
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,  
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name."  
Most highly favoured lady. Gloria!

4. Of her, Emanuel, the Christ was born  
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn  
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:1  
"Most highly favoured lady," Gloria!

## Reflection

"Whose child is this?" I imagine Mary faced that question a few times in the weeks and months after her encounter with Gabriel.

“Whose child is this?” There were plenty of options for her answer. Should she say Joseph’s? That’s what most people would assume, then they could just hurry forward the wedding and no-one would be any the wiser.

If not son of Joseph, perhaps son of David? It’s what the angel had said, and it had a nice, royal ring to it. But what does it mean, to have the throne of his father David? This would be a peasant baby, born in a backwater town of a backwater country. The glory days of David were long gone. Sure, Mary was distantly related to David, but she wasn’t exactly next in line for the throne. So why would this child be son of David?

Then there’s Son of God. What was that all about?

“Whose child is this?” Three answers. Son of Joseph, in his present situation. Son of David, in his past heritage. Son of God, in his future ministry.

We also have three answers to the question “Whose child am I?” We can look at our present situation and see what makes us the way we are. Our childhood, education, job, friends and happy or unhappy fortune all shape how we are. Some will be our own doing, other down to chance. We are also children of our history. Much of what I think and do is determined by what my culture thinks and does. It is worthwhile attempting to step back every once in a while to check my assumptions and unspoken beliefs, and whether I am happy with that legacy. Most importantly, we are children of God, by that same Holy Spirit adopted into his family and called to pray “Our Father ...”

Prayer

Gracious Lord,  
You sent your son from heaven to earth,

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Good King Wenceslas  
JM Neale 1853

You can hear this hymn here  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQVUMG6LZGM>

Good King Wenceslas looked out On the feast of Stephen When the snow lay round about Deep and crisp and even Brightly shone the moon that night Though the frost was cruel When a poor man came in sight Gath'ring winter fuel	2: "Hither, page, and stand by me If thou know'st it, telling Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?" "Sire, he lives a good league hence Underneath the mountain Right against the forest fence By Saint Agnes' fountain."
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3: "Bring me flesh and bring me wine  
bring me pine logs hither  
Thou and I will see him dine  
when we bear him thither."  
Page and monarch forth they went  
forth they went together  
Through the rude wind's wild lament  
and the bitter weather

ceremony.

Let's not miss the greatest gift, tucked away in a corner and wrapped cheaply.

The stable and the shepherds prove that this baby is for everyone.

So let there be glory to God on high,  
and to this our earth let there be peace  
May this baby bring good will, let life  
Begin and never cease

Prayer

Loving God

Help us to remember how vulnerable you became at Christmas  
You came then as you come now  
to a world that is broken and in need of healing  
You came without power, but with love  
Without might, but with hope  
Into the darkness you brought light. Amen

[Saturday 26th December - Good King Wenceslas](#)

The Rev'd Lis Mullen is an active part-time retired minister. She is a member of Kendal URC

*This hymn written by the Anglican hymn writer and translator JM Neale was written to promote the spirit of generosity. It is thought that Boxing Day - the Feast of Stephen - was when servants and tradespeople received their "Christmas boxes" from the employers. Turning the legend of Wenceslas he used the song to influence people to be more generous.*

St Matthew 25: 34-40

that we on earth might be children of heaven.  
Give us grace to live as daughters and sons  
of you, our heavenly father  
and to do your will on earth  
as in heaven. Amen.

[Monday 21st December Ave Maria](#)

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Prevett, Chaplaincy Coordinator, Newcastle University

*The Hail Mary prayer comes, in its first part, from today's Scripture reading and has been set to countless forms of music over the years. Whilst not normally used in the Reformed tradition it does still inspire millions of Christians around the world.*

St Luke 1: 39 - 45

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Ave Maria/Hail Mary

This can be heard here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2H5rusicEnc>

Ave Maria, gratia plena,

5Dominus tecum,

benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
et benedictus fructus  
ventris tui Jesu.  
(Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,  
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.  
Amen)

the Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou amongst women  
and blessed is  
the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
(Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death,  
Amen)

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
Reflection

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.*

In the United Reformed Church in which I grew up there was a retired man who came from Northern Ireland. He had a strong Presbyterian background and, while some congregants there would leave worship as we got to the Communion hymn, he was vehemently against the use of candles in worship. For him, their use was so intrinsically linked with Roman Catholicism, and to the sectarianism of his upbringing, that he couldn't stomach their presence in church. I suspect, although I do not know, any emphasis on Mary would have provoked a similar response, highlighting yet another area in which Roman Catholicism had a monopoly.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.*

Perhaps that's why we don't focus much on Mary in our Reformed tradition, perhaps just as we don't focus too much time on other supporting characters in the story of Jesus. Of course, we don't need to venerate Mary (or Peter or Paul for that matter), but in distancing ourselves we perhaps leave ourselves wanting. There is a missed opportunity.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.*

Reflection

Wait, what is that?  
Can you see it?  
Can you hear it?  
Surely it isn't for us?  
It's so bright it fills the whole sky, it's so loud it echoes across the valley.  
It's too glorious for people like us, it must be meant for someone else.

Yet the angels didn't appear to the great and the good in nearby Jerusalem, barely 6 miles away.

They deliberately sought out people who were among the lowliest in society.

Shepherding wasn't a career choice for the brightest and best, it didn't demand skills or brainpower. Whoever heard of a good shepherd?

So here was a group of unimportant shepherds on the hillside above an insignificant town on the edge of the world. Maybe the angels were lost on their way to somewhere else. Their celestial sat-nav had sent them the wrong way.

But there was no mistake, this was the place, this was the time, and these were the people who got the invitation to witness the arrival of a baby born to shepherd many sheep.

Imagine for a moment that Jesus had been born in a palace and that the witnesses were royalty, High Priests and political leaders, how could that baby have grown to become our saviour?

Jesus was destined to be born in an outbuilding.

It's easy to be distracted at Christmas by the sparkly, impressive, expensive and seemingly important things. All of the pomp and

heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

While Shepherds Watched  
Nathum Tate c1700

You can hear this here  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgYzJDxxzN8> for the tune normally used but the far better tune Cranbrook is here  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZxvfZ9Ga2E>

While shepherds watched Their flocks by night All seated on the ground The angel of the Lord came down And glory shone around And glory shone around	And this shall be the sign And this shall be the sign."  "The heavenly Babe You there shall find To human view displayed And meanly wrapped In swathing bands And in a manger laid And in a manger laid."  Thus spake the seraph, And forthwith Appeared a shining throng Of angels praising God, who thus Addressed their joyful song Addressed their joyful song
"Fear not," he said, For mighty dread Had seized their troubled minds "Glad tidings of great joy I bring To you and all mankind, To you and all mankind."  "To you in David's Town this day Is born of David's line The Savior who is Christ the Lord	

"All glory be to God on high  
And to the earth be peace;  
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men  
Begin and never cease, begin and never cease!"

The Church provides a space for John the Baptist, that prophet who foretold of the coming of Christ, with the lectionary focusing on him several times (perhaps too often!) over the winter period. Yet we tend not to give such an open platform to Mary, to hear of the prophetic words echoed through Elizabeth, the glory of her Magnificat, her proclamation, her foretelling. Shouldn't we be more open to the presence of a woman's story in our faith? Are we frightened to focus on Mary, not because of sectarianism but because we cannot fathom what it means to see a young woman as a pillar of our devotion? Maybe our problem is that we fail institutionally to give platform to enough women in our Church?

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.*

Prayer

Mary's Child,  
help us to realise where we fall short  
and do not hear your prophetic Word  
because we disregard the messenger.  
Mary's Child,  
make us aware of the voices we do not hear  
and the faces that do not fit  
when we celebrate your incarnation.  
Mary's Child,  
speak to us in new ways,  
through all your Prophets.  
Blessed are we in your name. Amen.

Tuesday 22nd December - Masters in This Hall

Pat Stannard is an Elder at Muswell Hill URC

*This appears to be an ancient carol but only dates from the Victorian era when William Morris - famous for art, design, poetry and socialism, and much more - wrote it. It tells of the poor shepherds who came to see Jesus.*

St Luke 1: 46-55

And Mary said,

‘My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

Prayer

God of Mission,

Who, alone, brings growth to your church.

We thank you for the gift of your son Jesus Christ this Christmas.

We pray that you would give

vision to our planning,

wisdom to our actions,

and power to our witness.

Help us to grow in spiritual commitment to you,

through celebration of the birth of your son Jesus Christ.

Help us to spread the message of hope in our communities.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen

*Adapted LYCIG (Leading Your Church Into Growth) Prayer*

Friday 25th December - While Shepherds Watched their Flocks By Night

Sam Goodman, Elder, Central URC, Derby

*This carol is a paraphrase of the Gospel account of the angels and the shepherds made by Irish man Nathum Tate. Many tunes have been used for this - we normally use Winchester New which has an appropriately churchy feel to it. However, Cranbrook normally gets folk to enjoy the hymn and sing it with some gusto!*

St Luke 2: 15 - 20

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this 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 the manger.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her

## Reflection

It always baffles me how much the phrase “and they were terrified” downplays the reality that the shepherds must have been experiencing. It’s very much just mentioned in passing. But the fear and anxiety the shepherds must have been feeling, is tough to describe. But similarly, a short sentence from the angel for comfort: “Do not be afraid”. “Yeah, cheers”, they must have been thinking. But then they are offered something that will bring great joy for all the people. A reason not to be afraid, a reason to celebrate!

When we’re feeling afraid or anxious, often we need more than just a few words. And it’s not something that can necessarily change overnight, or in an average afternoon. But as we can see here, God, in this case through the angels, offers us so much more than just a few words. We are offered a Jesus-filled life. A life that will still have its ups and downs. But in those down moments, we still have Christ by our side, and each other.

It amuses me how we happily sing this carol all the way through Advent, yet withhold the famous 6th verse of ‘O Come All Ye Faithful’ until Christmas Day. Yes, I know it talks about ‘born this happy morning’, but still.

But doesn’t that say something? About how we, too, should be harking like the angels throughout all of Advent, Christmas, and beyond. Harking about the good news of Jesus Christ. I can guarantee someone, somewhere, will be feeling afraid, and they will be blessed by hearing the message of “Do not be afraid, for see- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:” Try it, see what happens...

I wish you all a very blessed Christmas.

## Masters in This Hall William Morris

you can hear this song here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX6BbFDIGLE>

1. Masters in this Hall,  
Hear ye news to-day  
Brought from over sea,  
And ever I you pray:

*Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!  
Nowell, sing we clear!  
Holpen are all folk on earth,  
Born is God's son so dear:  
Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!  
Nowell, sing we loud!  
God to-day hath poor folk raised  
And cast a-down the proud.*

2. Going o'er the hills,  
Through the milk-white snow,  
Heard I ewes bleat  
While the wind did blow:

3. Shepherds many an one  
Sat among the sheep,  
No man spake more word  
Than they had been asleep:

4. Quoth I, "Fellows mine,  
Why this guise sit ye?  
Making but dull cheer,  
Shepherds though ye be?

5. "Shepherds should of right  
Leap and dance and sing,  
Thus to see ye sit,  
Is a right strange thing":

6. Quoth these fellows then,  
"To Bethlem town we go,  
To see a mighty lord  
Lie in manger low":

7. "How name ye this lord,  
Shepherds?' then said I,  
"Very God," they said,  
"Come from Heaven high":

8. Then to Bethlem town  
We went two and two,  
And in a sorry place  
Heard the oxen low:

9. Therein did we see  
A sweet and goodly may  
And a fair old man,  
Upon the straw she lay:

10. And a little child  
On her arm had she,  
"Wot ye who this is?"  
Said the hinds to me:

11. Ox and ass him know,  
Kneeling on their knee,  
Wondrous joy had I  
This little babe to see:

### Reflection

The most surprising thing about this carol is that it was written by William Morris, even as a Chaucerian pastiche. Apart from a brief flirtation with Anglo-Catholicism in his early 20s, he was never attached to any religion, organised or otherwise.

But once you know he is the author, everything falls into place. As a child riding his pony in Epping Forest dressed in a miniature suit of armour, Morris was fascinated by the Middle Ages. As a student he came into the orbit of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with its devotion to medieval art techniques and a highly romanticised view of the labour of the common man in that era. He carried that on to his later career in the Arts and Crafts Movement where his company Morris & Co produced many church windows in the medieval style.

It is typical of Morris that the message of the Birth of Christ is carried to the masters by, one assumes, a servant informed by an even lower class of people, the shepherds. He was a tireless campaigning socialist, promoting the ideals of social equality and despairing over the widening gap between poor and rich in Victorian Society.

In the Magnificat, it is the simple village girl Mary who is chosen by God to carry the Saviour. She not only accepts the commission but understands the message, singing: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."

It serves us to remember that Jesus did not rush to recruit "the Masters"

12. This is Christ the Lord,  
Masters be ye glad!  
Christmas is come in,  
And no folk should be sad:

### St Luke 2: 8-14

In that region there were shepherds living 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!'

Hark the Herald Angels Sing  
Charles Wesley 1707-1788)

You can hear this carol here  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_iLXNSlaYc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_iLXNSlaYc)

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King!  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled."  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With th' angelic host proclaim,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."

Christ, by highest heaven adored:  
Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
Late in time behold him come,  
Offspring of the favoured one.  
Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;  
Hail, th'incarnate Deity:  
Pleased, as a man, with us to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel!

*Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"*

Hail! the heaven-born Prince of peace!

Hail! the Son of Righteousness!

Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings

Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die:

Born to raise the folk of earth, born to give us second birth.

An honest and righteous man.  
Transformed by good news.  
Dreamy visions.  
An angelic voice.  
Normal life filled with uncertainty.  
Different patterns.  
A new normal.  
Uncertainty.  
Expectation.  
Surprise.  
Delight.  
God speaks.  
God saves.  
God's son.

Prayer

Extraordinary God,  
you touch the lives of young and old alike,  
in moments of surprise  
with words of comfort.  
Speak through our dreams and visions  
that your incarnation among us  
can be truly God with Us. Amen.

[Thursday 24th December - Hark the Herald Angels Sing](#)

Dan Morrell, Media for Ministry Consultant working across several synods, member of St Andrew's Roundhay, Leeds.

*This hymn has been edited since Wesley's, long forgotten, original. George Whitfield changed some of the words and cut some of the verses (which were originally of four lines each) whilst Charles Burnley changed the hymn to its current form of three 8 line verses. We have no idea what the original tune was - Wesley wanted something slow and solemn! - since it was paired with Mendelssohn's masterpiece.*

of his day to lend his ministry credibility. He sought out people like us, you and me, to hear his message and carry it forward.

Prayer

Lord, help us to discern the extraordinary in the ordinary;  
to value goodness, courage and generosity of spirit  
in those we encounter;  
to serve those who need our assistance,  
rather than worship the idols of status, wealth and celebrity.  
Amen

[Wednesday 23rd December - The Cherry Tree Carol](#)

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Prevett, Chaplaincy Coordinator, Newcastle University

*Other than he was an honourable man who encountered the Divine in his dreams, we know little of Joseph. This lack of knowledge inspired people over the years to wonder how he really felt when learning that Mary was with child. The Cherry Tree Carol is one such attempt.*

St Matthew 1: 18-25

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 had 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.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall

name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son;[b] and he named him Jesus.

The Cherry Tree Carol  
Traditional

you can hear this carol here

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYaFGSG\\_x80](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYaFGSG_x80)

When Joseph was an old man,  
an old man was he,  
he married Virgin Mary,  
the Queen of Galilee.  
He married Virgin Mary,  
the Queen of Galilee.

Then Joseph flew in anger,  
in anger flew he;  
let the father of the baby  
gather cherries for thee!  
Let the father of the baby  
gather cherries for thee!

Joseph and Mary  
walked through an orchard green.  
There were cherries and berries,  
as thick as might be seen.  
There were cherries and berries,  
as thick as might be seen.

Then up spoke baby Jesus,  
from in Mary's womb:  
bend down the tallest branches,  
that my mother might have some.  
Bend down the tallest branches,  
that my mother might have some.

Mary said to Joseph,  
so meek and so mild:  
Joseph, gather me some cherries,  
for I am with child  
Joseph, gather me some cherries,  
for I am with child

And bend down the tallest  
branches,  
it touched Mary's hand.  
Cried she: Oh look thou Joseph,  
I have cherries by command  
Oh look thou Joseph,  
I have cherries by command.

Reflection

Rough-hewn hands.  
Labourers hands.  
Dry and cracked from years of working.  
A carpenter.  
A joiner.  
An honest and righteous man.  
Worried about disgrace.  
Upset.  
Confused.  
Normal life turned upside down.  
Disorientated.  
Unexpected.  
God speaks.  
God saves.  
God's son.

There's something utterly unusual and abnormal in the midst of something entirely unremarkable and unsurprising. Amid a normal man's life comes the most extraordinary and most disrupting. Within a life that was planned and ordered, within a life that was settled and secure, comes the disorientation, the uncertainty, the doubts about the future. We've all experienced our fair share of that this year. And yet, into all that is going on, into the personal doubt and anguish, to one about to walk away, God speaks a word of freedom and peace. Speaks not only a word, but The Word.

How often have we needed to hear that this year?

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A joiner.