

East Durham Methodist Circuit:

Online Service 2nd January 2022

Prepared by: Rev Alf Waite

Theme: Journey to Egypt

Call to worship:

Praise the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD; praise him, you servants of the LORD, YOU who minister in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God. Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant. For the LORD has chosen Jacob to be his own, Israel to be his treasured possession.

Hymn: O come, all ye faithful

J F Wade

StF: 212 / H&P: 110

1. O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him
Born the King of Angels:

**O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.**

2. God of God,
Light of Light,
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God,
Begotten, not created: **O come ...**

3. Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above!
Glory to God
In the highest: **O come ...**

4. Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing! **O come ...**

Prayers of praise and thanksgiving:

Lord God, Almighty you have called us to call the whole world to worship. You are the Lord of the whole universe mighty in strength and full of all wisdom. And yet this Christmas season we become more aware of your love for us and we are really thankful for your care. We want to sing your praises and seek to follow your ways. Come among us and inspire us to worship. We offer you all that we have and all that we are. At the beginning of this new year we also dedicate it to you. And offer ourselves in service.

We pray that you will forgive us our sins and enable us to walk in freedom.
In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**

We join our prayer together as we say the Lord's prayer:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.**

Amen

Reading: John 1:10-18

New International Version

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Hymn: Silent night, Holy night

Joseph Mohr

StF: 217 / H&P: 112

1. Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child
Holy infant, tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

3. Silent night, Holy night
Shepherds quake, at the sight
Glories stream from heaven above
Heavenly, hosts sing Hallelujah.
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born.

2. Silent night, Holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

Reading: Matthew 2:13-23 The Escape to Egypt

New International Version

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Message: "Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt."

"Of all the bars in the whole world why did you come into mine?" Famously from the film Casablanca. It is probably a misquote but in reading our passages for this service it is what came to mind. I maybe want to change it too, "Of all the barns in all the world why this one? Well Matthew strongly tells us, scripture foretold it and God had planned it that way. There is so much symbolism and so much realism in this and in it we can find so much truth and encouragement. So three points:

- 1. God works in mysterious ways to fulfil His purposes!**
- 2. The Mission will not fail!**
- 3. Opposition will not quench the move of His Spirit!**

God works in mysterious ways to fulfil His purposes!

In these incidents in the childhood of Jesus, Matthew shows that God works both through surprises and continuity. Jesus' coming whilst it was expected it was a bit of a surprise that he came as a baby, weak and vulnerable. In his commentary on our passage Tom Wright tells the story of meeting an Historian, who was sceptical of the claims of the Christian Faith around Christmas. He came to Tom after the service and said he had worked out why people liked Christmas. It was because it was about a baby it threatens no one.

The Wise Men knew they were looking for a king and they went where you would expect to find a new-born king in a palace in the major city. But they were wrong and sadly alerted Herod to His birth. The star took them to Bethlehem, to a humble family.

Matthew also uses Old Testament quotations to show that the birth of Jesus is a continuation of the story of Israel. His coming is not in a vacuum, a separate plan of God but a fulfilment of THE PLAN. Jesus is in line of the great people of Israel,

Abraham, David. Whilst they may have been looking for this birth it wasn't where or how they expected it. So, the journey to Egypt was not out of character it speaks of the first Exodus, Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. The return for Jesus and His parents took them to Nazareth, a despised area. Can anything good come from Nazareth? The prophets spoke of it.

The Mission will not fail!

Matthew has a clear message to the church he is writing to, believed to be predominately Jewish Christians. The church is growing despite opposition, and it is being joined by thousands of non-Jews. There is a movement to split away from its roots. Matthew through his gospel keeps the links through use of already known scriptures. To say that God never gives up on anyone. He wants all to grasp His saving plan. He has a special purpose for the Jews in His plan. We need to remember Jesus was a Jew, He would reign on David's throne forever. Through the cross He will lead people in the New Exodus to freedom from sin and even death. That was the reason He came, and He will keep faithful to that. For Matthew's reader then and now the message is clear: God knows what He is doing. We can always put our faith in Him. Every time we put our trust in Him, we prove Him to be right. In Mary and Joseph, we see the best examples of trust. They did everything God asked of them to bring Jesus into the world and keep him safe. Imagine the faith that took, yet we seem to often reflect on the Christmas story as if it is on a par with our favourite fictional stories.

Opposition will not quench the move of His Spirit!

Matthew's Gospel would bring great comfort to the church, it was new, frail and exposed to all kinds of dangers. We could say today that the church is being hit hard, it is still frail and exposed to all kinds of opposition. As individuals we too can feel threatened by the ways of the world, it is good to know that Christians are not immune from the trials of life. But we need not fear for God is with us.

The coming of Jesus was threatened even from conception. Mary could easily have been stoned to death for becoming pregnant out of marriage. If Herod had had his way Jesus would have been slaughtered before His life had begun. There are those who believe this story of Herod killing the children was just put in to fill out the story. We know though from historians of the day he did a lot worse, 20 or 30 children wouldn't even have twinged his conscience. He slaughtered a number of his own family because their presence threatened his security. He rounded up 300 of the influential people in society leaving orders that at the moment of his death they were to be slaughtered.

There is often a tragedy at Christmas time, in the past there have been plane crashes and tsunamis. This year it seems to me it has been the plight of children, whether that be the news of gorgeous children brutally tortured by their parents in this country - just unbelievable but true - or the plight of children in Afghanistan, badly in need of humanitarian aid and the loss of any kind of education which will mar their futures. Also, the thousands of covid orphans in Peru. And in this last week we heard of a report on the Care System in this country which has allowed gang leaders to run the homes and recruit into the County Lines system.

Then Jesus could have been lost in Egypt, but God's hand was upon Him. No kind of opposition could put Him out. His own people did not receive Him and opposition built throughout His life. And as I said, the church was not well received and in many countries today, the church is not welcome.

Matthew's record of some of the events of Jesus' childhood encourages us to believe God's purposes go forward no matter what and we must take heart in that. We do not know what 2022 has in store for, hopefully we will see some reprieve from all this sickness. What we will not see is God giving up on us or giving up on His purpose to see lives saved, for Jesus came to seek and to save the lost and in all the dangers He achieved freedom for humankind. So take heart and trust and keep on trusting. **Amen**

Hymn: Go tell it on the mountain

Geoffrey Marshall-Taylor

H&P 135

**Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.**

3. And lo when they had seen Him
They all bowed down and prayed
They travel round together
To where the babe was laid. **Go tell ...**

1. While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night,
Behold, throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light. **Go tell ...**

4. Down in a lonely manger
The humble Christ was born,
And God sent our salvation
That blessed Christmas morn. **Go tell ...**

2. The shepherds feared and trembled
When lo, above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed the Saviour's birth! **Go tell ...**

Prayers of Intercession:

Jesus Christ, born in a stable,
Be with the poor and homeless this Christmas time.

As we pray, live and give; shine your everlasting light.

(silent prayer)

Jesus Christ, born of Mary,
Be with young mothers across the world this Christmas time.

As we pray, live and give; shine your everlasting light.

(silent prayer)

Jesus Christ, visited by Shepherds,
Be with all who have to work this Christmas, and those who long to work.

As we pray, live and give; shine your everlasting light.

(silent prayer)

Jesus Christ,
who became a refugee,
Be with those who fear for their lives, and those who have left homes and families this Christmas.

As we pray, live and give; shine your everlasting light.

Amen

