

Carol Service, Sunday 21st December 2021

"Hope is passion for what is possible"
- Soren Kierkegaard

Welcome to St Bride's Church: St Bride's is committed to a vision of faith which is creative in worship, progressive in thought and inclusive of everyone. You are most welcome to the thirteenth annual carol service hosted by Open Table, our worshipping community which welcomes everyone but especially our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transg, Queer/Questioning, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) community. Open Table gathers on the first and third Sunday of each month at 6.00pm for refreshments and 6.30pm to build community, celebrate faith, and deepen spirituality. Everyone is most welcome. For more details, visit stbridesliverpool.org.uk/lgbtqia

**We hope you enjoy this evening's celebration.
Please join in where you see words in bold type.**

As we gather, Liverpool Rainbow Chorus sings:
'Carol of the Bells'

Welcome: Warren Hartley & Beth Powell from the
Open Table Liverpool leadership team

A Queer Call to Worship by enfleshed.com

Beth: Blessed be the Non-Conforming One.
God, who took on flesh

Laura: of the poor
of an immigrant
as an infant.

Beth: Was birthed by a woman
with no help of a man.
This Holy One won't be hindered
by social norms.

Laura: She defies our expectations.
She challenges our preconceptions.
She awakens us to new possibilities.

Beth Praise be to God, the queerest of us all.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

The Advent Wreath is a tradition dating from the 1500s. The circle symbolises the love of God which has no beginning and no end, while the evergreens and lighted candles signify the persistence of life and light in the midst of winter. A candle is lit each Sunday as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the one the Bible called Emmanuel (Hebrew for 'God with Us'), Jesus of Nazareth. Each of the four Sundays of Advent has a theme hope, peace, love. This week is love!

First Candle:

We light this candle that it may shine around us
reminding us to stay awake
and to expect the coming of the Christ,

**We wish you and yours
a very happy Christmas
& a peaceful & joyful
New Year**



the love at the heart of all our longings.

Stillness

Second Candle

Listen for the voice in the desert,
the wisdom from the most unlikely people,
the water of healing and new life
in unexpected places,
including within ourselves.

Stillness

Third Candle

For the imprisoned parts of our lives,
healing and risen life are promised.
The signs and gifts will be there,
The unexpected and gentle oil for our anointing
and the messages of reassurance.

Stillness

Fourth Candle

The life of God is conceived in humankind.
See the fragile light here.
Do not put it away because you cannot understand
where it comes from or where it will take you.
It lies in our hands and is held there
in trusting vulnerability.

Choir – *O Come All Ye Faithful*

First Bible Reading - Isaiah 9:2, 6,7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For a child has been born for us, a child given to us.

Reading: *I'm An Eagle*, by Desmond Tutu, S. Africa

For a very long time - I shouldn't say always - I thought that this was how things were ordered. That the setup of whites being top dogs and the rest of us being trodden underfoot was by divine arrangement. And yet, you see, there is something in all of us that is always rebelling, that refuses, that is almost recalcitrant: there is something which says, I know I am made for something different. I am not a chicken, I'm an eagle, and when I'm pointed at the sun, I must soar. My spirit tells me I am made for transcendence... We have a God who is not neutral, we have a God who is very biased in favour of those who are always shunted apart.

Carol: *What child is this?*
(to the tune 'Greensleeves')

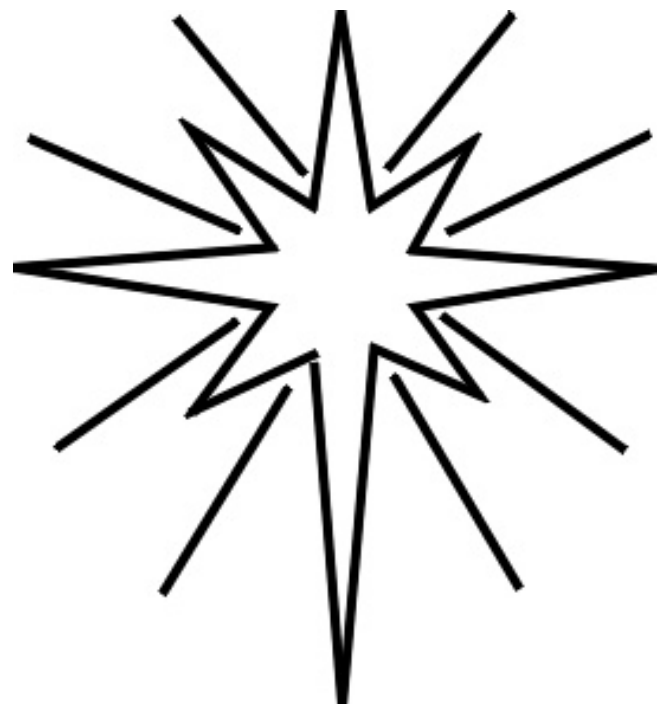
All sing: **What child is this who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing:**

**while fields and floods,
rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

**He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
and wonders of his love
and wonders of his love
and wonder, and wonders of his love.**

Choir: *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*

All I want for Christmas is you



Choir: *The First Noel* -

Sixth Bible Reading - John 1: 1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Reflection by Beth Powell

Carol: *Silent Night*

All sing: **Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child;
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace**

**Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing alleluia:
Christ, the Saviour is born,
Christ, the Saviour is born.**

**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**

Blessing by Revd Laura Ferguson, Team Vicar of the Parish of St Luke In The City, which includes St Bride's.

Written by Revd Dr Rachel Mann, patron of Open Table Network:

May the God of anger and mercy
stir that beautiful, boisterous black angel
growling within you, causing you
to cherish who you are
and who you will be.
And may you find in the electric storm
of your life that eye of calm
cracking with energy enough
for you to resist
being stripped of hope, faith and love.
And the blessing of God,
Wise-woman, wound-mender, wildfire
be with you all, this night and always.

ALL: **Amen**

Carol: *Joy To The World*

All sing: **Joy to the World, The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart, prepare him room,
and heav'n and nature sing
and heav'n and nature sing
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing**
**Joy to the earth! The saviour reigns;
let us our songs employ;**

**Come, greet the infant Lord,
the babe, the Son of Mary!**

**Why lies he in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear, shall pierce him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The babe, the Son of Mary!**

**So bring him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come rich and poor, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The Virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The babe, the Son of Mary!**

Second Bible Reading - Luke 1:26-35,38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The woman's name was Mary. And Gabriel came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! Our God is with you.' But she was much perplexed by these 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 child, whom you will name Jesus.

Poem: *Angels* by Mary Oliver

You might see an angel anytime
and anywhere. Of course you have
to open your eyes to a kind of
second level, but it's not really
hard. The whole business of
what's reality and what isn't has
never been solved and probably
never will be. So I don't care to
be too definite about anything.
I have a lot of edges called Perhaps
and almost nothing you can call
Certainty. For myself, but not
for other people. That's a place
you just can't get into, not
entirely anyway, other people's
heads.

I'll just leave you with this.
I don't care how many angels can
dance on the head of a pin. It's
enough to know that for some people
they exist, and that they dance.

Choir - *Ding Dong Merrily on High*

Third Bible Reading - Matthew 1:18-21

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When Jesus' 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 God 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 child, whom you are to name Jesus, for your child will save God's people.

Poem: *Beatitudes for a Queerer Church* by Jay Hulme

Blessed are the outcasts;
the ostracised, the outsiders.
Blessed are the scared;
the scarred, the silent.
Blessed are the broken;
for they are not broken.
Blessed are the hated;
for they are not worthy of hate.

Blessed are those who try;
those who transform, who transition.
Blessed are the closeted;
God sees you shine anyway.
Blessed are the queers;
who love creation enough to live the truth of it,
despite a world that tells them they cannot.
And blessed are those
who believe themselves unworthy of blessing;
what inconceivable wonders you hold.

Choir: *In the Bleak Mid Winter*

Fourth Bible Reading - Luke 2:1-7

Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. This census – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space.

Reading: *God in solidarity* by enfleshed.com

God takes on flesh
and joins life in the struggle -
this is what radical solidarity feels like.
Lives and souls and bodies entangled.
Risks and possibilities shared.
We're in this together.
The mess, the beauty, the work.
Don't be afraid to feel hopeful.
God's promises are kept.
God won't opt-out or turn away.

God won't give up when things get tough.
God won't defend power, or privilege,
or institutions, or tradition
at the expense of freedom, or love,
or liberation, or your worth.
God's with-ness is birthed at the margins.

God knows what's at stake.
Let all who are weary, rejoice!
All of evil's deceptions will be revealed
and fear of unjust powers will cease.
The Liberating One now dwells among us,
calling upon hearts from all walks of life
to open. to take courage. to soften. to release.
Behold, the Sacred enfleshed reveals the way of Love

Carol – *Mary, blessed teenage mother*
to the tune of *Once in Royal David's City*

All sing: **Mary, blessed teenage mother,
with what holy joy you sing!
Humble, yet above all other,
from your womb shall healing spring.
Out of wedlock pregnant found,
full of grace with blessing crowned.**

**Mother of the homeless stranger
only outcasts recognise,
point us to the modern manger;
not a sight for gentle eyes!
Oh the joyful news we tell:
'Even here, Immanuel!'**

**Now, throughout the townships ringing,
Hear the black Madonna cry,
songs of hope and freedom singing,
poor and humble lifted high.
Here the Spirit finds a womb
for the breaker of the tomb!**

**Holy mother, for the nations
bring to birth the child divine:
Israel's strength and consolation,
and the hope of Palestine!
All creation reconciled
in the crying of a child!**

Fifth Bible Reading - Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw this One's star in the east and have come to worship this child.'

Poem: Extract from *Narrative Theology* by Pádraig Ó Tuama, patron of the Open Table Network

And I said to him
Are there answers to all of this?
And he said
The answer is in a story
and the story is being told.

And I said
But there is so much pain
And she answered, plainly,
Pain will happen.

Then I said
Will I ever find meaning?
And they said
You will find meaning
Where you give meaning.

The answer is in the story
And the story isn't finished.