

Communion Service 20th December 2020

The Fourth of Advent

with Peter Widdess

Personal preparation before the service begins.
Please take time to remember
where you are, and
why you are here.
Give thanks and
become still
in the presence of God

Music before the service

SoF 408: O come, all ye faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
O 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

Sing, choirs of angels
Sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above
Glory to God, in the highest
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

Yes, Lord, we greet Thee
Born this happy morning
Jesus, to Thee be the glory given
Word of the Father, Now in flesh appearing
O come, let us adore Him

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

(CCLI: 6089319)



Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you.

And also with you

The advent wreath

God our Father,
the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary
that she was to be the mother of your Son.
Though Mary was afraid,
she responded to your call with joy.
Help us, whom you call to serve you,
to share like her in your great work
of bringing to our world your love and healing.
**We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the light who is coming into the world.
Amen.**

The candles take their places on the wreath.

Song: Light one candle

Light one candle for hope
One bright candle for hope
He brings hope to every heart
He comes, He comes

Light one candle for peace
One bright candle for peace
He brings peace to every heart
He comes, He comes

Light one candle for joy
One bright candle for joy
Every nation will find salvation in
Beth'lem's baby boy

Light one candle for love
One bright candle for love
He brings love to every heart
He comes, He comes

He brings love to every heart
He comes, He comes

(CCLI: 11026168)

Lord Jesus, light of the world,
blessed is Gabriel, who brought good news;
blessed is Mary, your mother and ours.
Bless your Church preparing for Christmas;
and bless us your children, who long for your coming.
Amen.

Canticle: Mary's song
"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost
thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”
Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
As it was and ever shall be, now and forever. Amen

Collect for the 4th Sunday in Advent

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

The reading is taken from the letter of Paul to the Romans,
chapter 16.

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God

Our hearts and our minds are open

Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my
gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ,
in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long
ages past, but now revealed and made known through the
prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that
all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from
faith—
to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!
Amen.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke
Glory to you, O Lord

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel
Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be
married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.
The virgin’s name was Mary.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

Once a month in my parish in Maulburg was "Altennachmittag". The church hall would fill with the elderly who would enjoy coffee and Zopf, with or without raisins, a short act of worship, greetings from the mayor and the chance to chat with each other. In December was the Adventsaltennachmittag with Lebkuchen. One year in my meditation I wanted to talk about Mary, so I gave my curate a poem from Berthold Brecht entitled "Maria". Sitting at the table with me and the mayor, she said, "No, I can't read that out. Brecht has got it wrong. Mary didn't have any pain or fears at the birth of Jesus. There was no blood and water. She didn't need anybody to help her. She was just so happy."

The mayor took the poem and read it out to the old people. A very moving discussion started with old ladies telling each other about how they had experienced the birth of their children, the fear, the pain, the shame, and, at the very end, the joy. A few old ladies were weeping. One lady said: I had never realised that Mary gave birth to Jesus just like I bore my children.

Today, the 4th Sunday in Advent, we think about Mary. The gospel tells of the beginning of her pregnancy. We need not concern ourselves today with questions about virgin birth, but rather I wish to concentrate on the fact of pregnancy and the role of Mary as mother. I do not wish to idealise her as a phantasy faith model who gets pregnant and gives birth as if in a dream. Let us follow Mary through the following months and years. She is not the first woman who is pregnant and is due to marry a man who isn't sure whether it is his child or not. The difficult circumstances of the birth are the story for next Friday.

But then there is the desperate flight to Egypt, the struggle to keep this small baby alive.

We have some years later a new beginning in Nazareth, and the birth of more children. The birth narratives in Luke end with puberty. This precocious lad is rebelling against his parents, running off without a word to them and staying alone in Jerusalem – This story often gave 13/14 year old youngsters in my confirmation classes a chance to think about themselves, and their behaviour towards their parents.

At some point in the following years Mary lost her husband. Life as a widow, with a family to feed and bring up, is never easy at the best of times. But the oldest child, the one best able to carry responsibility with her in the family, goes away with a group of ... well what...followers? She hears that Jesus is possibly ill, mentally disturbed. She goes with her other children to bring him home. Jesus repudiates her advances, dismissing her as no longer his family.

It is not easy for Mary to be the mother of Jesus. There may have been the moments of joy, the feel good moments, but as Luke reminds us, there were a lot of things which she heard and saw, which she had to ponder in her heart.

Finally she was there at the crucifixion. Jesus gives Mary and the beloved disciple, John, responsibility for each other. We lose trace of her after his death, but we can read in the Acts of the Apostles how the younger brother of Jesus played an important role in the early church.

So why is the story of Mary so important? It is an uncomfortable story with elements which give more questions than answers. It is not an ideal story, not the triumph of faith which my curate wanted. The relationship between mother and son was not easy. There was pain on both sides, not just at his death.

So why do we need to keep on reading and hearing this story? The old lady in Maulburg gives us the answer: Mary gave birth to Jesus just like I bore my children. Or put another way: there is no crucifixion without a real pregnancy, there is no resurrection without a real birth. For the last 2000 years we have struggled to define how in Jesus the human and divine are one. All too often our language drifts towards the one or the other direction, and our faith becomes unbalanced. The language of divinity, Jesus the Son of God, is easier, greater and more attractive than to say Jesus, son of Mary. Just think in next few days about the language you use in your personal prayers, or the language of liturgy. Is the language a good balance between divine and human?

Jesus told a lot of stories because stories convey truths in lively ways on topics which defy an easy abstract definition. This is why we need the story of Christmas. This is why we need the story of Mary.

Mary earths the humanity of Jesus. She makes his life relevant for us, because his life is our life. One of the first stories John tells in his gospel is the wedding at Cana. As the wine was getting in short supply, Mary tells the servants to do what Jesus tells them. He wasn't too happy at her intervention, but this time he actually does what she says. The wedding party was saved, and the wine was good, it was very good.

Intercessions (by Solveyg)

This week I had a little walk through my little village in the evening. The lockdown had already begun, so all the streets were empty, no people outside – a bit lonesome, spooky. After a little time my feeling changed, because I realized, that most of the houses were nicely decorated with light. Many had trees with fairy lights, candles or stars in their windows. So, despite of the misty weather, I felt warmth and somehow like advent, waiting for Christmas, when we will celebrate the birth of our saviour.

Lord, in this very special advent time I pray, that we might see the light, that you gave us in Jesus, your dear son. Help us to remember, what Christmas really means; not lots of food and presents, but Your light and love for this world, especially in this dark and difficult times of Corona. Help us to see, that social distancing is not only separating, but also connecting by the

fact, that we are all in the same situation. Avoiding personal contacts these days is somehow the biggest prove of love for each other, caring and protecting.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for all people, who are keeping the society running; doctors and nurses, scientists and researchers, teachers, supermarket workers, hygiene and sanitation providers, supporting neighbors, priests and laity, giving pastoral care, musicians and artists and every unmentioned supporter. Let your light of peace and love shine before them, comforting and guiding, healing and protecting.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for your churches all over the world, finding new ways to celebrate Christmas services under difficult conditions. Help all, who are leading the services, with your wisdom and Spirit, so that your light may shine in every house, at every place, where people will be together in mind or person, connected via internet or phone.

This week we heard, that the interviews for finding a new minister for our church, were successful. Lord, we thank you so much for making that possible, it really feels like Christmas, bringing new hope, making your way for us. Stay with us, uphold and support us in the transition process and, till our new minister arrives, be with our locums and worship leaders.

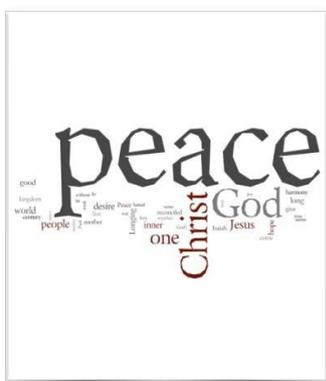
Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for all in need, who are sick, mentally or bodily, all who need a listening ear, calming words or just a compassionate smile. Let them see your light and experience the joy of Christmas. Let them feel, that they are rooted despite of social distancing and established in your love, give them healing and hope. Strengthen them, their family and friends, who are looking after them, with Your power, understanding and hope, comforting and healing

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your dear Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Peace

May the God of peace make you completely holy,
ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
We give one another a sign of peace.



The Lord be with you
and also with you.

It is always right to give you thanks,
God our Creator,
loving and faithful,
holy and strong.
You made us
and the whole universe,
and filled your world with life.
You sent your Son to live among us,
Jesus our Saviour, Mary's child.
He suffered on the cross;
he died to save us from our sins;
he rose in glory from the dead.
You send your Spirit
to bring new life to the world,
and clothe us with power from on high.

Father, on the night before he died,
Jesus shared a meal with his friends.
He took the bread, and thanked you.
He broke it, and gave it to them, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this to remember me.
After the meal, Jesus took the cup of wine.
He thanked you, and gave it to them, saying:
Drink this, all of you.
This is my blood,
the new promise of God's unfailing love.
Do this to remember me.

Great is the mystery of faith:
Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Pour your Spirit on us
that we may love one another,
work for the healing of the earth,
and share the good news of Jesus,
as we wait for his coming in glory.

For honour and praise belong to you, Father,
with Jesus your Son, and the Holy Spirit:
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

The giving and receiving of communion

SoF 420: O little town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in the dark street shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.
For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the Angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.

How silently, how silently
The wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven
No ear may hear His coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive Him still
The dear Christ enters in

(CCLI: 7091446)

SoF 243: In the bleak midwinter

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan;
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain,
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty —
Jesus Christ.

Angels and Archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air;
But only His Mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

(CCLI: 294736)

Prayer after communion
Heavenly father,
who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary

to be the mother of the promised saviour:
fill your servants with your grace,
that in all things we may embrace your holy will
and with her rejoice in your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



The Blessing

May God himself, the God of peace,
make you perfect and holy,
and keep you safe and blameless, in spirit, soul and body,
for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;
and the blessing ...

As we await our coming Saviour,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Postlude

Wunder über Wunder

Wunder über Wunder so herrlich
Gottes Geheimnis offenbart.
Wunder über Wunder so heilig!
Friedefürst, Gottessohn wunderbar

Einfach und dennoch so wunderbar,
die Weisheit von Alters her seht.
Demütig, dennoch so unschätzbar,
Unscheinbar das Heilige entsteht
Unscheinbar das Heilige entsteht.

Wunder über Wunder so herrlich
Gottes Geheimnis offenbart.
Wunder über Wunder so heilig!
Friedefürst, Gottessohn wunderbar

Seht, wie der Gott der die Welt erschuf,
in erbarmender Liebesflut.
Kommt nun in Menschengestalt zu uns,

Kommt durch Fleisch und Wasser und Blut.
Kommt durch Fleisch und Wasser und Blut

Wunder über Wunder so herrlich
Gottes Geheimnis offenbart.
Wunder über Wunder so heilig!
Friedefürst, Gottessohn wunderbar

Jesus sei herzlich willkommen hier,
unser Bruder und guter Hirt.
Wer hätte gedacht, dass es möglich wär,
Dass das Wunder der Wunder geschehen wird
Dass das Wunder der Wunder geschehen wird

(CCLI: 5622234)