

# CHRISTMAS

25/12/21

## CAVES BEACH

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

We gather to celebrate the birth of the one who is the light of the world.

**We are here to worship God - and his Son Jesus - born this night in Bethlehem of Judea.**

We light the candle of hope to remind us of the promises made by all the prophets that God would raise up a saviour for his people Israel.

**Christ is our hope and our salvation. He calls us to share our hope in him with each other.**

We light the candle of peace to remind us that it is only with God and by following in his path that true peace can be found.

**Christ brings the peace of God to us. He calls us to share the peace he gives with each other.**

We light the candle of joy to remind us that God gives joy to every heart that abides in him.

**As Mary rejoiced in the birth of Jesus - so his birth in us brings us joy. God calls us to share the joy he gives with each other.**

We light the candle of love to remind us that Jesus is God's gift of love to us - and that in him, the light of love triumphs over darkness.

**Love never fails - it transforms all those who give it and receive it. God calls us to share his love with each other.**

### **Lighting The Christ Candle**

We light the Christ candle to remind us that the light of the world was born this night.

**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined.**

You, O Lord, have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy.

**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.**

His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**He is also called Emmanuel, for in him God is with us.**

**Almighty God - you have made this night time by the gift of your son, born of the Holy Spirit and of Mary.**

**Upon him rested all your grace, through him has come all your mercy. Let his light shine within our hearts tonight even more brightly than it shines from the candles in this place. Help us to hear your word and to celebrate your everlasting love through him. Amen**

## **READING #1**

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.

<sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
7 His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

### **HYMN 311** Silent night

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEH7\\_2c644Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEH7_2c644Q)

### **PRAYER**

We enjoy the good things of Christmas so much; the brightly wrapped gifts, the turkey, the decorated tree.

Yet we know there will be empty plates  
and homes where there are no gifts, this Christmas holiday season.

We enjoy the special people of Christmas so much; family members home for the holidays, good friends, and those from whom we receive cards and letters.

Yet we know there will be people lonely, loneliness at this time of company, and those who feel the ache of loss.

We enjoy the worship of Christmas so much; the candle lighting, the gospel "Birth of Jesus: birth of" stories, the wonder of "The Word: made flesh made flesh."

Yet we know it will be hard to sustain our faithful response to Jesus Christ throughout the year.

*(Time for silent reflection)*

### **Words of Assurance**

The birth of Jesus, your Beloved, O God,  
gives us confidence that we can make changes for good.

It will be possible to bring food: for the hungry to the hungry, friendship to the lonely, and faith to the searching.

The birth of Jesus: new beginnings, Jesus: birth of affirms the joy of new beginnings!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

## **READING #2**

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.<sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)<sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.<sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.<sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,<sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.<sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.<sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.<sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.<sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."

**HYMN 303** Hark the herald angels sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICt1s44cfMM>

## **SERMON**

I'm an Innkeeper by trade. My inn is nothing like the motels you are accustomed to seeing today. No fancy rooms, no maids to come in every day and change the linens and turn back the bed. My inn is my house, just some plain rooms with straw on the floor for passers-by to sleep on. That's all there is. There are also a few stables out back for their horses and pack animals. It's my income, my well-being, my occupation. I'm an innkeeper.

A few weeks ago, I had some unusual visitors stop by. A group of men called Christ's people, or better known to you as Christians. I had heard of these people. They were troublemakers. So much hostility has happened in Israel because of them and their beliefs. These Christ people had a leader they called Jesus. They saw him die, but they didn't believe it. They believe he rose from the dead.

(Pause)

Do you know what they call this Christ? They called him the Anointed One of God, the chosen one of God, the long-awaited Messiah. Imagine that!! The Messiah?!

They spoke of him as a great teacher, healer, and a worker of miracles.

They were talking about their Jesus, their Messiah. I was captivated by their discussion. I had never had any of these Christians stay here before. I was curious. So, I listened to their conversations that evening and what I heard not only astounded me, but it began to trouble me.

They began by reciting our scriptures: scriptures that talk about the coming of the Messiah, and his birth, they said, in Bethlehem.... Bethlehem!!!!

I live in Bethlehem. Why, if the Messiah was to be born in such a small town as Bethlehem, you'd think we would all know. There is no place for one to hide in Bethlehem. No signs are posted on the Bethlehem Town notice board proclaiming, "Bethlehem: birthplace of the Messiah." "There is no Messiah in Bethlehem," I said to myself.

(Pause)

In their conversations they talked of a great star. This star shone and proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, they said. There was a star like that at one time. It was many years ago now. It appeared about the time Cyrenius was Governor. Rome was taxing us again. I remembered seeing it, but I never paid too much attention to it. After all I'm an innkeeper and not an astrologer. Besides, the time of taxation was near and I needed to have all my rooms ready for all the visitors that would be arriving. I didn't have time to worry and wonder about a strange phenomena. There are so many things in the universe that I don't understand. A new star was just one of them.

(Pause)

They knew of this star. And it was important to them.

They also knew of other events about which strangers outside of Bethlehem would not be knowledgeable.

In talking about the birth of their Messiah, they mentioned how his birth was made known to shepherds. With great smiles upon their faces, they told how the shepherds came to the stable to see the Christ child and how they left there singing, proclaiming glory to God for what they had witnessed.

How did they know about the shepherds?

My friends and I have talked, and we have laughed about that very incident. My friends had seen shepherds in town one night, during the time of the great star. It was strange to see shepherds in town after dark. It would have meant that they left their flocks alone. Shepherds wouldn't do that. We wondered why they would come to Bethlehem at night. None of the stores were open. They couldn't get any goods. Why would they be coming to Bethlehem at night? We just wrote it off as one of those strange events that happen.

You see, Shepherds are a very strange people. You would have to be a little odd, I think, to give up your entire life to live with sheep. You become one of them. You smell like one of them. You are not welcomed in very many places. Shepherds are a strange lot. I considered it odd that they came to town that night. It's strange that they sang. But remember, these are *shepherds* we are talking about strange people.

But why did these Christian folks know this story? Why is it so important to them?

(Pause)

They then talked about people they call wisemen, men from the east, who came to see the young child, this Messiah. I admit there were individuals here in Bethlehem at that time who fit this description. They stood out among the rest of the common folk. My friends talked about these three men, in particular, because they did something quite peculiar. They came to Bethlehem in the light of day, but left secretly under the cover of night. It was as if they were hiding something. We wondered why. And now these Christians said they know why. They said these three visitors didn't want Herod to know where the Messiah was born. They feared for the child's life because of Herod. They feared that Herod would kill the child.

(Pause)

Killing infants. It happened a short time after these three strangers left Bethlehem. Herod killed the young boys, two years old and younger. Herod killed my son.

Herod was a mad-man. He was absolutely out of his mind. For some reason shortly after the disappearance of these wisemen, troops came and took our young male sons and killed them. These men over here, these Christian men, said that our sons were killed because Herod was wanting to kill the Messiah, The King of Israel, God's Chosen One, Our Saviour. How did these men know of all this? They knew things only a person who lived in Bethlehem, would and could know.

I became more troubled as they talked. So, I had to go and share with them. As I talked with them, they told me more about their Messiah. They told me more about their Jesus. The miracles they had seen Him do. Then there were the teachings he had shared with them. Now they were proclaiming his story.

I felt something in talking with them that I thought I could never feel. It was then that an overpowering sensation came over me. I knew these men were right. The Messiah was born here - born here in Bethlehem.

Oh, I wanted to believe. With all my might I wanted to believe, but I couldn't let go. I was ready to voice my doubts. Sensing my growing disbelief, one of them put his hand upon mine, looked into my eyes and said, "Let me tell you how it all came to pass." With that he said these very words,

*"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."*

I began to cry uncontrollably. After a while I gathered my emotions. I told these men the reason for my outburst. You see, I remembered something. At the time it occurred it seemed so insignificant, not notable at all. I remembered a couple coming to my inn. The reason that I remembered

them is that they came later than all the rest - so much later. I remembered them because the man's young wife was so pregnant. You could feel for his poor wife. She was due to deliver at any moment.

But I had no room for them. I was sorry, but they just came too late. I didn't have room for them. The only place left was in my stables. And that's where they went. That's where I sent them.

And now these men are telling me that this same couple who stayed in my stable were God's appointed parents of His Son, and that He was born in my stables.

I began to cry again. It happened right under my nose. I know it now. Words cannot express what I feel. But I feel that God was here. The Messiah was here. And I missed it!!!!

If only I had known they were coming. If only I had known the significance of this young couple. I would have gladly made room for them. But I didn't, and I missed him.

(Pause)

There was so much happening: so much to be ready for at the time of taxation. In the midst of all this business the Messiah was born. He was born right here in Bethlehem and I missed it!!!

That's the concern I have for you. That's why I wanted to come and talk with you. You see at that time my house was filled with many guests. I had prepared for many guests. Yet the Messiah was born right here in Bethlehem and I missed it. God comes in God's time, not ours. We must be ready!!!

Friends, I have seen your city streets, your running around, and your buying of gifts. I've heard the talk of Christmas celebrations, of bringing together family and loved ones for your holiday. It's your time to celebrate the birth of the Messiah. Beware my friends. Beware.

I was so busy with my guests and my preparations that I didn't have time. I wouldn't let God in. I couldn't let the Messiah in, and His coming passed me by.

I missed His coming, though the signs were all around!!!

That's my concern for you: that in your Christmas rush, in your great feasts, in the opening of your presents - that the season does not go by, that the day does not go by and you not find room for the Messiah.



It's why you are here today: to prepare. It is why you've gone to the trouble to buy gifts, to bring people together for celebrations; and the reason why you have decorated. It's all in the name of the Messiah - all in the name of Jesus.

Remember that so that when you gather on Christmas Day, you are doing so because of Jesus. As you see the joy of children opening presents, as you see the joy of family reunited, let Christ be a part of that moment. Let him into your inn because he is already there, waiting for you to find room for him in your busy lives. He is the reason you gather for all your celebrations.

This is my concern. This is my prayer for you: that come Christmas, you and your family will herald what the angels sang about and what the shepherd proclaimed.

**Christ the Saviour is born.**

**Don't do as I did and not even give him a room.**

**HYMN 304** O come all ye faithful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3egGjeiWEA>

### **READING #3**

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, on this wonderful day we pause to remember the needy people of this world whom Jesus came to save may the light of his star touch every dark place.

As we meet in fellowship and goodwill, we pray for the end of terrorism and war in your torn world. We pray for so many caught in the whirlwind of the Covid epidemic. We pray for peace.

As we enjoy good food and good company, we pray for the hungry, homeless, and diseased bring them your compassion and justice, Lord.

As we enjoy being relaxed and happy today, we remember the sick, the lonely, the frightened, the anxious and the sorrowing - for their wholeness in life we pray bring them your comfort and peace, Lord.

As we prepare to leave this place of worship to go our different ways, we remember those friends and loved ones who are not with us this Christmas give them the assurance of your presence, Lord.

As we pass by other churches, we pray for them, too, knowing that our unity and community is found in Jesus Christ. Fill them and us, Lord, with Christmas joy and praise.

O Word made flesh, give us the will and capacity to embody our prayers in compassionate and courageous deeds fill us with the joy of service.

God in the highest, worthy of glory, hasten the day when the song of the angels shall find perfect fulfilment:

in the name of your incarnate Son, Jesus Christ Immanuel, we pray as your Son taught us;

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

### **BENEDICTION**

Let us go forth in celebration,

on this, our Christmas Day!

May the star of hope shine above us

and the voices of peace be raised in joy.

May the Child of God's love be found among us

and a new day be born

as we go to tell the world that the Christ has come.

Amen.

**HYMN** Angels we have heard on high

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