



'Worship at home' December 18th 2022

This is the **fourth Sunday in Advent**. Although the anticipated Christmas celebration draws near, we continue to await the fulfillment of God's kingdom in our world. **Lighting a candle** reminds us of the presence of Christ already with us.



Opening

On this fourth Sunday of Advent,
we anticipate the celebration of Christmas.

Christ has come.

Signs of love and new life surround us,
sometimes unexpectedly.

Christ is with us.

We are called to live as a people of love
to bring love to others.

Christ will come again.

Come, and fill us with abiding love.

Amen

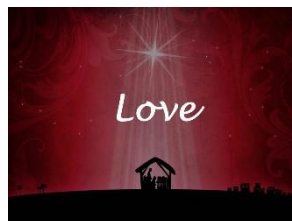
For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and
only Son, that whoever
believes in him shall not
perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

How do you experience
God's love?

How do you express
God's love?

In the birth of Jesus Christ we find, perhaps unexpectedly, the revelation of God's love for us and for all the world. The coming of Christ fulfills the promise of God's presence with us always, and brings hope for a time when God's reign of love will be realised in all its fullness, and the world will be transformed. This is the good news of great joy that the Christmas story brings. 1



Matthew 1:18-25

This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has

conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus - because he will save his people from their sins." Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, "A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel" (which means, "God is with us"). So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to. But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Good News Bible

**Reflect on the emotions Joseph may have felt
on hearing of Mary's pregnancy.**

Love

Uncertainty

Fear

Shame

Excitement

Hope

Anger

Disbelief

The angel's news was perhaps as surprising and unexpected for Joseph as it was for Mary. According to the custom of the time, a pregnant fiancé dishonoured her prospective husband and was grounds for divorce. It could, according to Jewish law, lead to death by stoning. Joseph plans to dismiss Mary quietly, trying to avoid public disgrace. However, Joseph's intentions are abruptly changed as, in a dream, an angel of the Lord intervenes. The child's gender, name and purpose are given, as foretold through the words of ancient prophets.



Joseph shows great courage and love in supporting Mary and in raising Jesus.

**When have you been asked to show courage
in a situation of love?**

Who or what has helped you in this?



Sometimes love takes us by surprise, and changes our plans. We find ourselves in unexpected situations, we are asked to make sacrifices, or choices on which the welfare of others depends. Sometimes love is difficult, and risky. It takes courage and commitment. It is precisely in these times that we find the truth of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us:

who offers unconditional, unfailing love; love which is stronger than death, and which can never be shaken.

A Prayer for Choosing

What we choose...	changes us.
Who we love...	transforms us.
How we create...	remakes us.
Where we live...	reshapes us.
So in all our choosing...	O God, make us wise;
in all our loving...	O Christ, make us bold;
in all our creating...	O Spirit, give us courage;
in all our living...	may we become whole.

- Jan Richardson United Methodist Church

**Unexpected joy bursting in
birthing new beginnings
creating love
renewing life
All will be well
God is here**

- Rev Sue Ellis

Prayer

God of love: You don't give up.
Through Your angel-messenger, sent to Joseph,
You encouraged his compassion:

'Don't give up on her.'

Enduring God, persevering with people –
we praise Your dependable faithfulness.

God of love: You extend Your care broadly and widely.
Your Word comes among humankind born of a woman,
wearing human flesh.

Down to earth God – we praise You for being with us.

God of love: You do not seek to gain or attain for self,
but instead offer One who comes from You
to save humankind from sin.

God of endless generosity – we praise You for the gift of Christ.

God of love: You rejoice in truth and bring to fullness
the words spoken in faith through the generations.

In the birth of a son, 'God with us',

You embody the Truth that sets all people free.

God of holy truth – we praise You for your living Word.

Rev Dr Grant Barclay, Church of Scotland



Closing

I wish for you the trust of Mary
and the faith to say, 'Yes!'

I wish for you the belief of Joseph
and the humility to follow

I wish for you an adventure
with shepherds
and a soundtrack of angels

I wish for you stars as your guide
and wisdom to visit you

I wish for you the peace of the manger
and the generosity of God

and I wish for you this time to know God is love
and born among us



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