

Incarnation's Beat

A steady drumbeat provides a background to this call stopping suddenly at the end, but picked up at other places in the service.

If there is a hint of hope,
it is now,
for wrapped up in time
(this time)
is a word that takes up the worries of the nations
and breathes through them;
a pulse beat,
a hope beat,
a heart beat,
that speaks of the future,
with heaven's life-beat.

It's a beat to which tables are set,
hope is proclaimed,
and justice is sung;
a beat to which swords are refashioned ;
war-tools transformed,
and futures proclaimed;
a beat through which prophecies are set free,
communities gather,
bread is broken.

And if we are astute,
in our brokenness,
in our longing,
in our gathering,
in our believing,
we will hear it,
recognise its familiarity,
and live by its beat.

Advent gives us ears to hear
this eternal rhythm of holy incarnation.

rgH
29th November 2007
Advent 1A

Advent, ploughshares, rhythm, hope
Isaiah 2:1-5

Stumped

Provide a tree stump in the middle of the worship space. Tie a small green leaf onto it towards the end.

From the bulb there comes a flower
from the desert rock a flow of water
from the rainbow there come the hope of life
from the bible there comes the word of truth
from the cross there comes the love of God
from the tomb there comes the resurrection
from the prophet comes the vision of new earth

but from the stump
from this dried out log
from a family tree that has lost all integrity...

...there comes the shoot of David
the lifeline of salvation
the promise of justice
the longing for transformation
the word of life
the expectation of Messiah

from the stump of Jesse
comes a covenant
reborn

rgH
7th December 2007
Advent 2A

Advent, Promise, new growth
Isaiah 11:1-10

Advent Confession

Where faith needs vision
may we see a little more clearly the promise of incarnation

Where believe needs a sign
may we watch a shoot appear on every piece of dried wood

Where trust needs insight
may we hear a prophet's word break open for our time

When the waiting is long and the longing has to wait
and the season seeks from us our time and energy
may we have ears to hear the angels rehearse
the stars shine
the earth bow
and the universe hold breath
in anticipation of incarnation

May we find the time and the place to join with the whole of creation
as it prepares for birth

And from our spent lives
may new growth come
from stunted hope
a promise heard again
from forgotten history
the light of the future shine

and may this be our confession
and our renewal
as we grasp hold this moment of belief
and turn towards the promise in faith

So be it

rgH
7th December 2007
Advent 2A

Advent, Jesse Tree, evidence
Isaiah 11:1-10

A Shoot of Jesse

As each speaker finishes, they hang a leaf onto the tree stump but on the same branch as the others. All these signs of incarnation are from the Bible that we don't always hear in this season.

Voice 1 I will call out a shoot of justice,
where the poor will be clothed in finery,
ready for a banquet,
and the mighty will serve them.
Then God will put on flesh,
and serve them all.
This is not Christmas cheer.
This is the justice of incarnation.

Hang leaf on the tree stump

Voice 2 I will call out a shoot of welcome,
where the stranger and the sinner
will be welcome guest
and those who sit closest to the host
will find a stranger sitting there.
Then God will put on flesh
and wait on them all.
This is not seasonal merriment.
This is the welcome of incarnation.

Hang leaf on the tree stump

Voice 3 I will call out a shoot of peace
where leopard and lamb
will play together
and those who make war
will find their swords beaten to ploughshares
Then God will put on flesh
and provide for them all.
This is not snowy sentiment.
This is the deep peace of incarnation.

Hang leaf on the tree stump

Voice 4 I will call out a shoot of repentance
where the axe will be laid at the root of the tree
and those who do not bear fruit
will be thrown in the fire.
Then God will put on flesh
and call us all into new living.
This is not a Christmas blockbuster.
This is the repentance incarnation will bring.

Hang leaf on the tree stump

Voice 5 I will call out a shoot of life
where in a young girl
a song of life will be placed
whose soul will praise the greatness of God
unbinding those imprisoned in life and setting them free
and through its singing
will bring terror to all those who oppress.
This is not a Victorian Christmas carol.
This is the life of incarnation.

Hang leaf on the tree stump

Voice 6 I will call out a shoot of heaven
where all God's people
will live in faith,
in the expectation of God,
and transform the world
with justice and truth.
This is not religious sentiment.
This is incarnation.

Hang leaf on the tree stump

When the time came

You will need three narrow candles and one large candles which will be lit by the three small candles.

When the time came
darkness humbled itself
and gave way
to the light
(Light a small candle)

When the time came
injustice crumpled
and was overcome
by the light
(Light a small candle)

When the time came
silence held it's own vigil
and was filled
with the light
(Light a small candle)

We believe the light will always break through
and whatever darkness thinks it is stronger than the light
has not yet heard of incarnation

When the time came
and when least expected
heaven let go
and the light was born
(Use the three small candles to light the big candle)

All I want for Christmas

We use a lot of twee language at Christmas. We like the baby in the stable but don't quite grasp incarnation. This contemporary Reading is based on the huge difference Isaiah so poetically spoke of when we believe God is with us.

- A All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.
- B All I want for Christmas is a long lie and a good film.
- A All I want for Christmas is for you to make me breakfast in bed.
- B All I want for Christmas is for you to be happy and not ask for the receipt so you can take your present back.
- A All I want for Christmas is for you to be with me, and a diamond ring.
- B All I want for Christmas is not to see the Visa bill till after New Year.
- A All I want for Christmas is a day where we all think of one another.
- B All I want for Christmas is to enjoy the season without a reminder of war and hunger.
- A All I want for Christmas is to know those who are hungry have food to eat.
- B All I want for Christmas is to hear the bells ring out on Christmas Day.
- A All I want for Christmas is to know that no one is left out from the family table.
- B All I want for Christmas is to trust we can help make the world a better place.
- A All I want for Christmas is to see beyond myself.
- B All I want for Christmas is for the expectation to last longer than the sales.
- A All I want for Christmas is for people to live with hope again.
- B All I want for Christmas is for leaders to mean what they say in their Christmas speeches.
- A All I want for Christmas is to wonder if deserts can bloom from barrenness.
- B All I want for Christmas is the compassion to live like that is possible.
- C And so the incarnation crept into the world, a subtle conspiracy to move folk from focusing on themselves to looking for meaning in living with others, to seeing the bigger truth and intent of stable births in an unstable world, of living inside a promise that is still yet to be fully fulfilled.
- A All I want for Christmas is for the world to have peace.
- B All I want for Christmas is for *me* to have peace.

Emmanuel

Crackers and candles,
presents and presence,
trees and truth.
Amid all we celebrate
you are hidden among us, O God.

Cake and carols,
parties and promise,
jingle bells and Jesus.
Amid all our traditions
you whisper among, O God

Santa and stables,
turkey and tradition,
brussel sprouts and birth.
Amid the season
you steel your way among us, O God.

Inn keepers and incarnation,
naivety and nativity,
cards and kings.
Amid the festivities
you find your way among us, O God.

Longing and light,
wreaths and Emmanuel,
decorations and donkeys.
Amid the efforts
you slip in among us, O God.

Bells and hunger,
baubles and injustice,
plays and homelessness.
Amid all the business
you call us from where we are, O God.

May we hear you
So be it
Amen

rgh
18th December 2007
Advent 4A

Emmanuel, traditions, Incarnation
Matthew

When skin is not enough

When skin is not enough to contain you
and words cannot hold you
and religion is too shallow to know you
and theology too vague to meet you
be born, O Jesus,
be born as love among us
for there we meet Emmanuel.

When the stable is not big enough
and the story too familiar
and the season too busy
and the time not yet right
be born, O Jesus,
be born as justice among us
for there we meet Emmanuel.

When the longing is too great
and the waiting too long
and the promise too disturbing
for our way of living
be born, O Jesus,
be born living among us
for there we can meet Emmanuel.

rg
19th December 2007
Advent 4A

Waiting,
Isaiah 35:1-10

I name this Baby

Mary and Joseph are looking through baby name books having this conversation.

- Joseph Well, I don't see why we have to call him Jesus. It's tradition in my family to name the first person after the father.
- Mary But Joseph, I don't know if there is anything traditional about this baby.
- Joseph True. What about my father. We could call him after him. If we did, he'd be really pleased.
- Mary But you've just told me the first son is always called after the father. And you don't remember you're the first son?
- Joseph Well what about something a bit less common and more regal like David, a splendid name, after all he was our greatest king.
- Mary That's certainly a better suggestion. David means, beloved, but he wasn't exactly the best behaved king was he? He did have a bit of a reputation. Maybe that's not the ideal name for him.
- Joseph Well what about my cousin Cliff. Richard says he's a great singer. Maybe that would be a good omen.
- Mary But Joseph, he's almost as old as God. It's a bit old fashioned. I would have liked to have called him after one of our prophets, like Isaiah, or Amos.
- Joseph Mary, most of them were completely mad. They didn't have their feet firmly on the ground. That's not a good image to label him with.
- Mary Levi was a name I liked a lot. It has priestly connections, sounds holy and very ancient.
- Joseph And sounds as if we've named him after Levi tax-collector down the road.
- Mary Frosty?
- Joseph Frosty!?
- Mary It's Christmassy. Maybe not. Zebedee.
- Joseph Aye, and middle names of Dougal, Brian and Dylan? Jeremiah would have been better. He was a great prophet of his time and didn't seem too mad. It mean's, 'God has uplifted'.
- Mary Well after reading *his* book you'll need up lifting. He was awfully depressing.
- Joseph Well what about my ancestor Shealtiel.
- Mary That rolls off the tongue easily. What does it mean anyway?
- Joseph Well, it means 'I've been asked of God' which I though was kind of appropriate.
- Mary If we're going with your ancestors (and why is it we are going through the male line rather than mine as I'm doing all the work) then what about Abraham.
- Joseph That means 'Father of many'. It certainly has authority and tradition. Yes that would be a good name. Though he did try and sell his wife three times. Hmmm, that's not such a bad idea.
- Mary Come to think of it, maybe 'Jesus' is just fine. 'The One who saves.' It has a certain hope about it. It's maybe very common, but maybe he'll give it new meaning.
- Joseph Okay let's go with Jesus. We can get a better idea with the next child.
- Mary One at a time, Joseph. One at a time.

rg
22nd December 2007
Advent

Names, Salvation, human, Divine
Matthew 1:18-25

Isaiah 9

1 The people that walked in darkness
2 The people that walked in...
3 The people that walked...
1 In darkness
All Have seen a great light
2&3 Light
2 Light, (*whispered*) light
3 And they that dwell in the land of
All (*Whispered*) The shadow of death
Pause
1 On them the light
All Shines (*repeat randomly so sounds chaotic*)
1 Their joy has increased
2 They have received gladness
3 They rejoice as if it was harvest
1 For their yoke-burden is shattered
2 They bear no oppressor's weight
3 They are free as in the day of Midian
1 Every
2 Battle
3 The warrior
1 Fought
2 Confuses
3 Like noise
1 And garments
2 Bloodied
3 And torn
1 By war
2 Shall be
3 Destroyed
1 For War
2 Will be
3 No more
1 For unto us
All A child is born
2 Unto us
All A son is given
1 And
1 & 2 The

All | *(shouting)* government shall be on his shoulder
1 | And his name?
2 | Wonderful
All | Counselor
2 | Mighty
All | God
2 | Everlasting
All | Father
2 | And prince
All | Of peace, peace, peace, peace *(getting softer until whisper)*
| *Pause*
3 | The people who have walked in darkness
| *Pause*
1 | Have seen a great
All | Light

Nativity Stories

Two people read this. Whoever is reading is facing front and whoever is not is facing back. The last word that is repeated gets quieter and the other reader reads the same word at the same time getting louder. Both turn on the saying of the repeated words.

The impatience of heaven
is felt here tonight,
with angels waiting on the edge of their seats
for heaven to tumble to earth
and fill her lungs
and let the world know
God is here, here, here....

...here, here, here starlight bends towards us
the angels clear their throats
the stable is made ready
and Mary labours, labours, labours...

...labours, labours, labouring with heaven
was Mary's joy and fear
Did she ever tell you, God, what the pushing of
a just world
filled with the truth
and proclaiming peace,
felt like,
and did you ever wonder, wonder, wonder...

...wonder, wonder, wonder, at the shepherds
tending on a hillside with the Good News yet unknown
embargoed by angel armies
crouched hidden behind the hillside
restless for the time of telling, telling, telling...

...telling, telling, telling Mary she was the chosen one
to bear heaven's child
must have been a worry for you, O God
for Mary's, "yes"
could have been "No... no... no!"...

...no, no, no room for the birth of light.
How dark the world had become,
yet in the places no one wanders
and among the people no one knows
God found a chink in which to stretch through
into the world
and find a home, home, home...

...home, home, home is where you know you belong
so what must it have been like, O God
to let go all you hold precious
from the safety of the heavenly home
and hand it over to an young handmaid
who was just an inexperienced, vulnerable woman... woman... woman...?

...women, women, women and men proclaim this Good News
beyond stables and nativities
beyond wise ones and shepherds
for it contains a power beyond itself
that shifts the allegiances of the world
towards the power of the light, the light, the light...

the light, the light, the light is waiting
straw is being gathered
innkeepers are retiring
silence descends
and heaven holds breath
and the poor will hear it first
the oppressed recognise it's truth
the stranger welcomed by the manger-side
the peace-maker hear it's message
the world find it's hope, hope, hope...

...hope, hope, hope wraps the story
now that the night is at its deepest
the darkness complete
the powers of heaven at their most vulnerable
now the people of God wait, wait, wait...

...for the light

rg
21st December 2007
Advent 4

Nativity, Stories, Light, Proclaiming
Matthew 1:18-25

The Hour

When all of time is crushed into a few moments
on the edge of everything
teetering on the brink of a new belief in the future
here is where we meet you, O God.

In the last moments of darkness
before the breaking in of the light
and the cry of a woman
and the birth of love
here is where we meet you, O God.

As silence deepens and the wonder stretches
and the ancient past, becomes our longed for future
and the word of the prophets
slip into fulfilment
here is where we meet you, O God.

Creating God
hold this moment
made of every time
and may we breath along with all those
who have been here before
to the heartbeat of hope
and know this moment
so full of expectation
is as sacred as they get
for contained here
is all the hope of the future
and the fulfilling of ancient longing

In the snarl of silence
as the universe bends with the weight of anticipation
where the worry is greatest
and the moment most urgent
here is where we meet you, O God,
in flesh.

rgH
20th December 2007
Advent 4

Midnight, Light, Christmas Day
Matthew 1:18-25

Time

If it was now, it would be a moment too soon
heaven labours with the light still
but the promise is almost broken open

If it was now, it would be a moment too soon
the hope is still a hope
but will soon be given new reason to believe

If it was now, it would be a moment too soon
the word is still to be spoken
but the cup of longing is near to overflowing

If it was now, it would be a moment too soon
for God is not ready yet
but the time is almost here for incarnation

If it was now, it would be a moment too soon
yet now is the time
and the time is now, God is reaching out with new life.

rgh
23rd December 2007
Advent 4

Time, Transformation, Incarnation
Matthew 1:18-25

Solstice Statement

The Congregation responds reading the bold stanzas

The light that once grew colder,
thinner,
in ever paler shades of blue,
is growing stronger once more.

***May we take this light into the world:
the light of stars and promise,
to guide home the homeless
and make a place of belonging for the lost.***

The light that was dying as year ends,
fading,
as the darkness crept in,
is living once more as it regains the day.

***May we take this light into the world:
the light of stables and incarnation,
to call with longing every traveler
and make a place of welcome for the stranger***

The light that became weak at the nights lengthened,
dissolving,
into the growing of winter,
is rejuvenating in the turn of the year.

***May we take this light into the world:
the light of Good News and justice,
to make known God's home in the world
where the heart loves unconditionally and kindness is always shown.***

The light that shrunk towards the solstice,
bowing,
with the shortening of time,
is ascending again as Emmanuel

rgH
28th December 2007
Christmas 1A

Solstice, New Year, Light
Matthew 2:13-23