

May we...

As the light begins to shift
and a crack appears in heaven
As stars slide across the darkness
and angels clear their throats
As an unborn agitates
with the labouring of love

may we...

As incarnation moves from promise
into skin
As words of prophecy
spill into every empty silence
As you, O love, shift restlessly
and begin to let go

may we...

As the world turns
and the rumour goes unnoticed
As grandiose words are spoken
yet never contain *the* word
As the longing and waiting and calling
are missed

may we...

may we shift restlessly along with heaven
at the breath-taking vulnerability of hope
speak justice into the silence of injustice
move towards those others move away from

may we forgive in order to bring new life to the world
prepare to change as all of heaven changes now
live towards what is right and away from what is wrong

may we pull on the hope of advent
live on the cusp of incarnation
and proclaim with our lives
the Good News
of promise
of holy flesh in a messy world
of emmanuel

may we...
may you
make way
for birth

So be it

rg
26th November 2009

Change, Renewal, Birth, Call
Off lectionary
Isaiah 7:10-18

Tired yet?

Play Leonard Cohen's 'Faith' in the background.

The gathering of darkness,
and the will to fight,
the pain born in conflict,
and the story of loss and fear:
these are the ways we live together.
O Love, aren't you tired yet?

The turning from light,
and the work of injustice disguised as right,
the journeys we make that lengthen the distance between us.
O love, aren't you tired yet?

The call unheard,
the silent questions we leave unlived,
and a graveyard of truth
left uncared for,
the bowing of the earth to extravagance,
and the weeping of the rivers.
O love, aren't you tired yet?

The sun,
the land,
the sea,
limited in what they can give,
for they have given too much already;
the soil,
the faith,
still your holy turf,
but un-renewed by a future un-owned.
O love, aren't you tired yet?

When the world leaves scattered,
holy words that seem like hope,
torn out from every page,
and past generations' lessons
are thrown crumpled in a forgotten alley
darkened by the shadow cast from a new world empire,
O love, aren't you tired yet?

But the seed of a promise
uncrumples,
in a name spoken in passion,
that holds out the future
as the past unwinds,
a love that will never let go,
called emmanuel.
O love, aren't you tired yet?

rg
27th November 2009

Faith, Covenant, Emmanuel
Off lectionary
Isaiah 7:10-18

Advent Call

When the moment is filled with dreams
and longing bends towards the light
when hope speaks of possibility
and truth breaks open in bread
then let us gather round the table
and know God's justice is arriving the world

rg
4th December 2009

Light, Communion
Off lectionary
Isaiah 11:1-10

Light

Quietly, the creeping of the light
conspires against the darkness
and with slow elegance
crushes the shadows
one by one.

And on the cusp of promise
the silence wilts with the burden of waiting
caught in the 'not yet' of incarnation.

It is a heavy silence
that bears the burden of war,
an exhausted planet,
a community that has lost its belonging.

But light cannot be caught by armies or by time
and in the first gasp of God,
it erupts and breaks free,
it's brightness cast across the universe,
wave on eternal wave,
never to be constrained,
and charging against the shadows
casts the darkness into the forgotten night.

rg
10th December 2009

Light, Darkness, Promise
Off lectionary
Isaiah 9:2-7

A son is given

A call to worship. While these words are being spoken people in the background are clearing away much of the church furniture leaving only a candle which is lit.

While the politicians talked and governments fought
a promise was spoken

While the planet grew tired and the people frightened
a child was named

While refugees wandered and trafficking became a business
a word was uttered

While right was not enough and might became an ethical option
a gift has been announced

While poverty was rife and economy greedy
a light was revealed

While war became permanent and hunger a way of life
a son was given

and he shall be called:

companion of strangers
breaker of bread
crucified God
servant of peace

rg
11th December 2009

Birth, Light, Promise
Off lectionary
Isaiah 9:2-7

The naming of People

This is TS Eliot's *The Naming of Cats* slightly rewritten to connect with the lectionary passage about names of Jesus and our own names, not the everyday ones, but the names that shape who we are: 'Justice-maker', 'Peace-bringer' etc.

The Naming of people is a difficult matter,
It isn't just one of heaven's holiday games;
You may think at first God's as mad as a hatter
When I tell you, we all have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES.

First of all, there's the name that the neighbours use daily,
Such as Betty, Isobella, Robert or James,
Such as Susan or Jonathan, John or Bill Caldwell--
All of them sensible everyday names.

There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter,
Some for the gentlemen, some for the dames:
Such as Doctor, Reverend, Lady, or Sir--
But all of them sensible everyday names.

But I tell you, a follower needs a name that's particular,
A name that's a calling, a gift to enlarge,
Else how can each keep up their faith perpendicular,
Or live out in love their love-given charge?

Of names of this kind, I can give an impression,
Such as Justice, Peacemaker, Generosity's lesson,
Such as companion-of-strangers, or else love-expression -
Names that belong to no more than one person.

But above and beyond there's still one name left over,
And that is the name that you never will guess;
The name that no science research can discover--
But each of us knows, and will never confess.

When you notice a person in sacred devotion,
The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
Their life is engaged in a heavenly notion
Of the doing, the enfleshing, the realizing of their name:
a sharing
an ineffable example
a clearly beautiful demonstration of their name

rg
12th December 2009

Names, Promise
Off lectionary
Isaiah 9:2-7

Magnificat

I feel full of the good news
taking it's shape within me

I feel God dance in me,
every step, a longing for life

God has looked upon me
and filled me with new life,
a blessing full of the most radiant light
I am the most fortunate person in heaven and earth

What God has done in me
will never be forgotten
the holy one
the creating one
has set my life on a new direction
so different from every other life in creation
and I will be their trust in the transforming one

God's promise is restless within me
surging with expectation
labouring with heaven
and generation after generation will find their story
in mine

For this birthing will be God's strength
here in me is the justice that will bring down the oppressor
that will laugh at the proud
and give the stolen kingdoms back to the poor
This birthing will bring together the hungry in celebration
round the banqueting tables of the rich
and leave the rich starved of their wealth

God has journeyed with landless people
and found in this birthing
where the longings of the ancients
have been heading
and will now be fulfilled

I am
Blessed by God
Blessed by God's promise
Blessed by God's promise broken open in me
in the screaming lungs of a child
born among us

rg
13th December 2009

Magnificat, Promise,
Off lectionary
Luke 1:47-55

Joseph, Joseph!

It was Joseph's mother-in-law with yet another bag to add to the donkey full of all the things you might need, but probably wouldn't, just in case it was too cold or too hot or there wasn't clean water or there was too much water, or the baby was a boy or if the baby was a girl, if the baby preferred a rabbit for a cuddly toy or a bear.

Every eventuality had been covered by Mary's mother and when all these eventualities were loaded onto the donkey, it gave Joseph an apologetic expression, and promptly landed on its stomach, its feet splayed on every side having collapsed under the weight.

Joseph sighed. He had found he had been doing a lot of sighing recently. It was all getting a bit much. He had no idea how to be a dad, especially with this child, and now they had to get to Bethlehem.

Joseph unpacked all the extra bags from the donkey and sat down beside it staring at the ground, dazed by the size of what he had been asked to do. And burst into tears.

The donkey wasn't much help. It just shifted a little to make them both more comfortable, turned its head towards Joseph who was resting on its flack, and placed its breaded chin on Joseph's lap.

"Joseph! O Joseph!"

"O no! Quick, hide me!" whispered Joseph to the donkey as he heard his mother-in-laws voice again.

But it was too late. Mary's mum stood staring at the bags and satchels scattered all over the ground, and then at Joseph, who was looking at the ground hiding his tearful eyes.

Then there was one of those silences, that was filled with meaning, where neither of them really knew what to do. Eventually his mother-in-law came over to him, pulled him up, placed her arm around him and Joseph heaved as he found himself crying his eyes out into her shoulder. This was something he never imagined himself doing, especially with his mother-in-law who was at least a foot shorter than him.

Joseph straightened up and avoided looking at Mary's mum. She briefly rubbed his back, as if saying she understand how difficult this was.

The weight of the news that he was to be the baby's father, the one to bring up the saviour of the world, was indeed a heavy burden to bear and perhaps a little unfair.

His mother-in-law turned towards the house again and whispered, "You're doing fine. It will be okay. I'll be back in a minute." and she went back through the doorway.

Just as that moment Mary keeked her head from round from the side of the house as if she had been hiding. "Is my mother away yet?" she asked.

"She's gone back into the house." said Joseph

"Okay, let's go!"

"Go?!"

"We have to get the Bethlehem don't we?"

"Yes, but now?" Joseph swept his hand around all the things that were lying across the ground.

"Yes! quick before she comes back. She's more organised than a rabbi's study."

"But..."

"No buts let's just go."

So Joseph helped Mary onto the donkey carrying a single bag of essentials and left the rest there at the doorway. And off they went along the road without saying good bye to anyone or being fully prepared.

A few moment's later Mary's mum came out from the house carrying a cup and a hankie, "Was that Mary I heard out..." Then stopped as she saw Mary and Joseph walking off down the hill.

"Mary!" she called. "Joseph!" But they didn't once look back. She looked at the bags lying about the place. Sighed huffily and said, "Well they'll just have to rely on God from now on."

And that's exactly what they did.

rg
13th December 2009

Preparing, Trusting
Off lectionary
Nativity Story

Top 20 Nativity

A retelling of the Shepherds story using music from various years of the charts. Narrator reads and finishes mid sentence a musician or appropriate sections of the track are played to finish off the sentence. A wee competition could happen to see who can guess the track first.

It was quiet... way too quiet... The night sky was crushed full of stars... It was as if (**The night has a thousand eyes – Bobby Vee**) and the shepherds were bunched together because they were cold on that night-time hill... and the oldest of them... who hobbled a little with a gammy leg... said to the youngest (**Come on baby light my fire – The Doors**)... so the youngest rubbed two sticks together and set the fire going... and encouraged by the flames they all decided to (**Move Closer – Phyllis Nelson**)...

And when they were all snug and warm... and their eyes were half shut... and they all began nodding off... when one of them suddenly sat upright and shouted out to them all (**I dreamed a dream – Susan Boyle**)...

But it wasn't a dream... Suddenly and unexpectedly... which mean the same thing... there was wave upon wave of (**Angel – Robbie Williams**)...

"Good grief!" the shepherds choked as they stood up... except the one with the sore hip... which the Biblical writers have more generously translated as (**Alleluia Chorus - Handel**)... There were millions of angels... shooting towards them... burning with (**Super Trouper - Abba**)... and the shepherds stood there bathed in (**Fields of Gold - Sting**)...

From among the angelic host a great voice proclaimed... "Do not be scared... We come with Good News... This is for the whole world... This is for (**Everybody in Love - JLS**)

The angel tapped his heavenly microphone... "Are you hearing me all right?"... The shepherds were transfixed and didn't look as if they were taking any of it in... "You over there"... said the angel to the oldest one... he was leaning to one side because of his arthritic hip... "Do you understand what I'm saying?"... The old shepherd stuttered and replied (**I do, I do, I do, I do, I do, I do - Abba**)...

"Well then, go down to Bethlehem and find the child born there and worship him"... Then all the angels burst into ethereal song and celestial dance... It was a bit of a (**Boogie Wonderland – Earth, Wind and Fire**)... and within a few moments they were all gone and the shepherds were left there on their own... so they all looked at one another and decided to (**Hit the road Jack – Buster Poindexter**)... and of they went like (**Wild Horses – Rolling Stones**)...

They went (**Riding through the glen – Frankie Lane**)... and then had to do (**The Climb – Miley Cyrus**)... to get to the town of Bethlehem on the hill... and there... finally... just off the main street was (**This Old House – Shakin' Stevens**)... and the innkeeper told them to go round the back where they would find a stable... There they discovered what the angels said was true... and they fell down on their knees and proclaimed (**I'm a believer - Monkees**)... and worshipped the new born king... While they were on their knees Mary said... (**Say a little prayer – Dionne Warwick**)...

The oldest shepherd thinking of his hip said... "If you don't mind I won't kneel, I've got a bit of the old (**Hippy hippy shake – Chan Romero**)... and off they all went proclaiming the good news to all the world... and since then each one of us has (**heard it on the grape vine – The Miracles**)...

rg
15th December 2009

Shepherds, Good News
Luke 2:8-20
Nativity Story

Not long

With each stanza that begins 'Well that we might...' a candle is lit somewhere in the worship space.

Well that we might light a light
for the night is almost at it's longest
and the day but a fleeting memory

Well that we might light a light
for the winter solstice is upon us
and the darkness has stretched to it's fullness

Well that we might light a light
for long shadows have silenced the land
as heaven sits on the brink of birth

the baby now stirring
the mother now quickening
the stable now welcoming
the world now waiting
the flesh now warming
and the dark now hesitating.

Well that we might light a light
for we stand against the darkness
knowing it has not got long to go

rg
17th December 2009

Waiting, Light, Solstice
Luke 1:46-55
Advent General

Darkening

When the season draws deeper
and the darkness stretches over the day
the sun lingers longer on the world's other side in the mornings
and departs quicker
then in the twilight shadows
we seek a word of promise
that is not caught by the light
but waits for us anyway.

When the stars seem older
and the night longer
the cold deeper
and the colours bluer
then the season comes to a head
and at the night's longest point
we listen out for the breaking in of the light
strengthening
as it pull back the darkness
to reveal the promise

When the memories that accompany us
make the season less merry
and shake some of the meaning away
then we hold them
scattered among your words
of care and grace
that nurtures the life
that knows us
holds us
and accompanies us through this time

rg
17th December 2009

Loss, Blue Christmas, Solstice
Isaiah 9:2-7
Advent General

Word & Song

May we sing incarnation into birth
may the very longing of this season
be enough for your promise to take on flesh
for bread to be shared
for planet to be loved
for lost to be found
for loneliness to be befriended
for seeker to be sought
for deserts to bloom
for flavelas to become palaces
for chaos to be given rhythm
for wars to end
May we sing incarnation into birth

And may we the words
that may the song singable

May we sing incarnation into birth

rg
19th December 2009

Song, Incarnation, Transformation
Luke 1:46-55
Advent General

How old is an angel?

This is based on a line of Jan Sutch Pickard in a piece called 'How Old were the Angels?' in *Hay & Stardust*, Wild Goose Publications

- | | |
|-----|---|
| One | How old is an angel? |
| Two | They go way back to Mary, and that moment of annunciation. It was the angel who proclaimed the good news, that first told the world of God's plan to bring renewal to the universe and hope to every time. The angel brought the news that God is reshaping the future. |
| One | How old is an angel? |
| Two | An angel is as old as hope |
| One | We have hope! |
| Two | As old as longing
As old as promise |
| One | How old is an angel? |
| Two | They go way back to the shepherds, who were suddenly disturbed from their routine and called to a journey to a town, a stable and a manger. It was the angel who called them out of their everyday existence and called them to find God in the everyday. |
| One | How old is an angel? |
| Two | An angel is as old as vision |
| One | We have visions! |
| Two | As old as revelation
As old as insight |
| One | How old is an angel? |
| Two | They go way back to Joseph disturbed within a dream, of fatherhood and naming. It was the angel who comforted and confused Joseph, then offered him the truth, only so many could take: that fatherhood for him, meant salvation for the world. Joseph was given the bigger picture and given a part in it all. |
| One | How old is an angel? |
| Two | An angel is as old as dreams |
| One | We have dreams! |
| Two | As old as prophecy
As old as trust |
| One | How old is an angel? |
| Two | As old as the story |
| One | But as young
as us |

rg
19th December 2009

Angels,
Luke 1 & 2; Matthew 2
Advent General

Christmas Eve

Here is a place
that waits in silence
eager to hear
the word of prophecy
break open
and reveal the light

welcome to it

It is an ancient space
that has waited long
for the light of justice
and the news of peace
and the word of grace
to build the promise and be heard

welcome to it

and gathered here
among us
are the ancients
whose longing is lengthier than ours
and whose hope we share
of promise and renewal
in the news of birth

welcome to it

so may we wait faithfully
long extravagantly
hope abundantly
yearn honestly
and listen well
for the silence is cracking
and the light is breaking through

rg
22nd December 2009

Waiting, Longing
Isaiah 9:2-7
Christmas Eve C

Crossover

For the moment we cross from Christmas Eve into Christmas Day

when there is one foot in the day and one in the night
when one side faces the darkness and the other the light
when there is one moment in yesterday and another in tomorrow
in the crossover
is the birth place

when one foot is on this edge of the border and one in the other
when one side says 'yes' and the other 'no'
when there is welcome on one hand and denial on the other
in no ones land
is the birth place

not in homes of the rich
or in corridors of power
not in banqueting halls of the wealthy
or in landmarks of affluence
but in gaps
in borderlands
in stables
as a displacee
is the birth place

when there is no longer time for past or future but only present
when there is no longer time for regrets or dreams but only waiting
when there is no longer time for Then but only Now
among us
within us
between us
today...
Christ is born

rg
23rd December 2009

Change, Christmas, Birth
Isaiah 9:2-7
Christmas Eve C

Stable Story

An all-age, non-literal, informal retelling of the stable story for the Sunday after Christmas.

The stable was a bit crowded... but it was warm... Three donkeys and two oxen plus a goat and a few chickens filled the space normally... Now there was a new family squeezing it's way in amongst the animals... a human family... mum, dad and child...

Mum was nearly a sleep... child was sound... and dad... Well dad was lying on his stomach with head resting in his hands... staring into the manger... which had been used as the newborns bed... And there was a permanent smile on Joseph's face... for the moment... That would soon all change... babies have the knack of being able to do that...

Joseph's eyes were beginning to get very heavy... Mary had already fallen asleep and the baby was still sound... but then there was a deep in-drawing of breath and Jesus eyes narrowed and he let out an almighty bawl...

Joseph fell over in fright... Mary sat upright... Joseph's eyes great large with fear, not knowing what to do... and Mary started to reach out to Jesus... when the stable door creaked open... and in poured half a dozen shepherds... who nervously edged towards Mary and Joseph... who in turn nervously edged away from them... Mary now holding Jesus...

'Eh, we've come to see the one who is the Prince of Peace.' said one shepherd...

Mary and Joseph looked at each other.

'We think his name is Jesus.' went on the shepherd.

May and Joseph looked at each other again with a look that said, 'Is this what it is going to be like from now on?'

Just then the door swung open again and a couple of travellers from way beyond this land came in saying the same thing. They looked fabulous though a bit dusty, travellers that had seen many things on their journey, but clearly this thing they saw now, was even greater, even greater, and they were silent as silent only as awe can be

Just as they knelt before Jesus, the door creaked open once more and in slid, or floated, or glided, danced or... well who knows how an angel moves, but there were quite a lot of them, and the stable was suddenly very full indeed. Not just with people but with light too. Not just with light, but silence also. Not just silence but glory.

And that glory has been slipping into the world ever since.

rg
26th December 2009

Christmas, Stable
Luke 2
Christmas 1C