



Hi Everyone,

My thanks to you for your patience as this devotional comes a wee bit later in the day. Our Church service this morning was our Sunday School Nativity Service which took the shape of a Homemade Christmas Movie shown in the church with massive input from parents and Children to bring it off which I am pleased to say we did and those who attended the service this morning seemed to enjoy.

This has been the strangest year ever and in all my 28 yrs serving as a parish minister, I have never known a time quite like it. Up till now we have held a summer mission successfully every year until 2020 when it had to be suspended. Every year as everyone looked forward to Christmas, we would look forward to hosting a Christmas Eve Family Service and Watchnight Carols by Candlelight Service - both of which we have cancelled this year. I had thought that we might be able to host a short single service on Christmas morning instead but, given announcements last night from the First Minister of Scotland and her advisors and the genuine concern about the new strain of Covid-19 being particularly transmissible, I have elected as many of my colleagues in other churches have, to cancel the Service on Christmas Day, sadly.

I am once again left wondering how people manage in the absence of Christian Faith in all this. What kind of Christmas am I going to have? Rising unemployment with people increasingly isolated from each other as well as from family and friends, unable to get out and about, with hospital beds filling up across our towns and cities and uncertainty about the future and how we will all cope, all the while watchful and fearful of catching this dreadful disease. In such Dark times we need something to illuminate the way forward. Eight centuries before Jesus was born, the Prophet Isaiah

announced that "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2) - words we believe that God had spoken through him to reveal who his Son would be - Jesus the light of the World. 'We sure do need that light now' as the Americans might say.

Of course our Christina faith is screaming at us at this point to affirm that the Light has indeed come and it is Jesus, the great gift of that first Christmas. We need his light now more than ever as we come to the darkest night and the shortest day. Despite all that has been happening, the gift of Christmas remains our greatest hope and with that hope we can continue to go on, no matter what so on that note I would want to say whatever kind of situation you find yourself in - have a great Christmas as I wish for you and yours, God's richest blessing of the season, despite all around us and I wish that 2021 will be a better year for all.

Stay safe as always
Calum

Some Church Intimations

Carnwadric Foodbank

A huge thanks is due to yourselves as well as some of the other congregations locally as we have been greatly blessed through all your help to establish and maintain the Foodbank here in Carnwadric Church.

There are some things we particularly need: toiletries, toothbrushes and toothpaste, baby wipes, tinned fruit and UHT milk.

Have a great Christmas in the meantime.

Flowers in Church

The Flowers this week have been gifted by Val Richmond in fond memory of her Dad - Ronald Baillie



A Christmas Greeting

One of our church members, Margaret Reid, has asked that I convey her best wishes for the Season to all in her Park Church Family at this time with the regret that she could not write to you or see you herself at this current time





"The prayer offered to God in the morning during your quiet time is the key that unlocks the door of the day. Any athlete knows that it is the start that ensures a good finish."

- Adrian Rogers

A Selection of Short prayer for Christmas Time: -

Dear Jesus, as we celebrate Your birth may we begin to see the world in the light of the understanding You give us. As you chose the lowly, the outcasts and the poor to receive the greatest news the world had ever known, so may we worship You in meekness of heart. May we also remember our brothers and sisters less fortunate than ourselves in the season of giving. Amen.

Heavenly Father, it seems so silly and wrong to get so depressed about this holiday season, but Lord, You know that I find holidays quite difficult to cope with, and I know that I can't break out of this cycle of holiday depression without Your help and strength. Show me what I ought to do in order to prevent those thoughts from taking hold of me, and pushing me back into a state of despair and depression. Amen.

Dear Jesus, as we celebrate Your birth may we begin to see the world in the light of the understanding You give us. As you chose the lowly, the outcasts and the poor to receive the greatest news the world had ever known, so may we worship You in meekness of heart. May we also remember our brothers and sisters less fortunate than ourselves in the season of giving. Amen.

Heavenly Father, the holiday season can be quite a trial and even a deep sadness to many people, especially those that are alone at this time. Draw very close we pray to those that are alone and lonely over this holiday time and may they discover closeness in their relationship with You that perhaps they did not enjoy before. Amen.

Heavenly Father, Christmastime is such a blessed season of the year as we remember the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in a stable in Bethlehem, and how we thank You for giving Your only begotten Son into this world so that by His death and resurrection, He could become our Saviour, and we could become Your children. We thank You for the wonderful hope that the Christmas message instils into each of our hearts, and the glorious message of the gospel of peace - peace with God to all who believe. Amen.

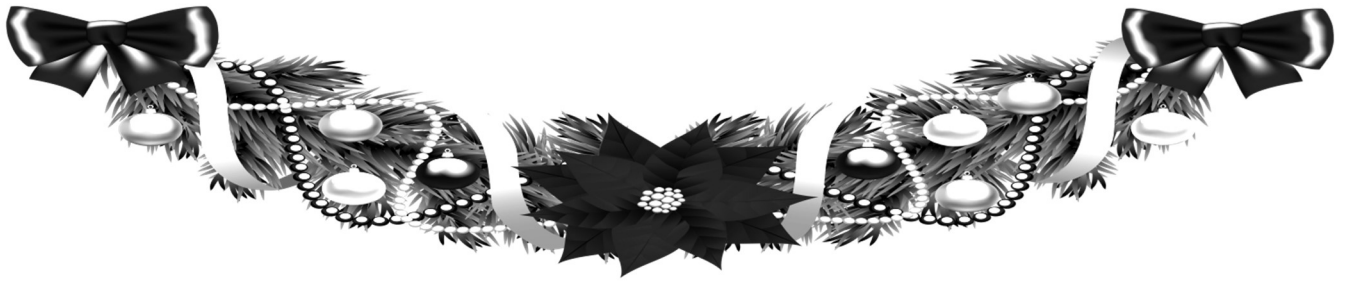
Lord, at this festive holiday time, we pray that You would be with us in all that we do and all that we plan. And today, we particularly want to ask You to bless the holiday celebrations that we will be participating in. We pray that Your love shines during this time and that we reflect You in our actions, attitudes and behaviours at the event. Prevent any discord we pray and may we be united together in love and fellowship to Your praise and glory. Amen.

Almighty God and Father of light, a child is born for us and as a son is given to us. Your eternal Word streamed down from heaven in the silent watches of the night, and now Your Church is filled with wonder at the nearness of her God. Open our hearts to receive His life and increase our vision with the rising of dawn, that our lives may be filled with His glory and His peace, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Dear Lord, may we be like the Wise Men who were guided to You by a star. Give us the wisdom to seek You, light to guide us to You, courage to search until we find You and generosity to lay our gifts before You, our King and our God forever and ever. Amen.

Heavenly Father be with all at the forefront of everything to do with this Pandemic, our Scientists and Researchers, our Doctors and nurses, those in working in Care Homes, in community Health and mental Welfare, those in the great charities struggling at this time and all the people they all care for at this time - may they all know your care and protection this Christmas time in Jesus' name we pray..... Amen

The Word of God For Today



Luke 2:8-20

New International Version

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

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

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”

¹⁵ 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.”

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



Greetings from all of us here at the manse.

They say a week in Politics can be a long week. I think the experience of 24 hours in the world of politics can be just as long. I am sure we all felt relieved to be coming out of Tier back into Tier 3 when it comes to living with Covid-20 Restrictions and those moving into Tier 2 may even felt their joy to be more ecstatic. Sadly of course with the news last night from Scotland's First Minister, that the rising concerns of a new strain of this disease blighting the world and our country in particular means we return to the restrictions placed upon us before once again. It has meant that we have had to cancel our Christmas Morning service and review the story of meeting together on Sunday mornings even under Tier 4 restrictions and we will seek advice about the best way forward there.

In all my years in ministry, never has so much, been so dramatically impacted, by something so small as the Corona Virus. Our lives have all been impacted by this dreadful time, some have lost friends or family through it. Some have uncertainty about their future. Who would have ever thought that the tensions caused by Brexit would be capped by that of this pandemic story. Some of us have family working in the front lines of Health and Social Care, a worrying time and even security of employment has become a huge concern and will become even greater yet in the aftermath. Whilst we have the hope of the

Vaccination Programme underway, we still have to endure the stringent protocols of washings hands, maintaining distance etc.

Our reading for today in our devotional looks at the remarkable moment when the Shepherds come across Mary and Jesus in the manger. Having met with an Angel while out on the Hills they also encounter what the Bible refers to as the Heavenly host declaring 'Glory to God'. They could not stop talking about it unashamedly loud in the darkest of night - no doubts causing quite a stir. It is Mary's response in all this that tweaks my interest where we read that she treasured these things in her heart (Luke 2: 19) One of the songs attached is that of Graham Kendrick's 'Thorn in the Straw' a lovely ballad that points to another time where the moment may not be so joyful - the cross of Calvary. I have conjoined that with another song by a man called Randy Stonehill who asks the question,

*"I wonder of this Christmas they'll begin to understand
That the Jesus that they celebrate is much more than a man"*

For me Mary's quiet contemplation of all that is going on is mentioned for a particular reason. I cannot help but think that on that first Christmas the joy of the moment is not lost on her even for an instant. I wonder if she was storing these joys for another time when the moment was not so happy and that maybe there is a lesson for us all in this.

Whenever we face the story of grief in our families, there is a sense of deep loss but there is also a thankfulness for the memories of our loved one, their influence, the things they said and did that remain memorable to them, happy and joyous, times that they rose to challenges of one kind or another and while they are physically gone, these memories and influences remain. In times of struggle and uncertainty it is often these happier times that cheer us in the midst of these difficult days. We should not take for granted these times that we have had or can have at this time.

There will be many reasons why we should treasure our memories and why we should take time to reflect on the moments that bring us joy as we raise a glass to absent friends or family that we miss with many hopes and dreams still to be fulfilled. While all is changing round about us and we are unclear as to what will happen next, the good news about Jesus is - "He is the same Yesterday today and forever", and He invites us to join with Him in life today and also for Eternity.

This Christmas, like Mary treasure the moments of the past and the present and while we may have to live with these difficult times, take hold of the gift of faith that Christ offers to sustain us through them. Treasure His promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Such a promise made that sustains us through life so that whether we identify with what Charles Dickens saw as "the best of times" or "the worst of times", we can know without exception that the Jesus of that first Christmas is with us, no matter what, even to the door of eternity.

I know we cannot have the kind of Christmas we would want to have but treasure the moment of those that are with you and in the interim be assured that there is one who will always be with you - no matter what.

Enjoy this strange Christmas, different as it is and know God's blessing even in these days

Calum



A Christmas Blessing

*As the Father Who loves us
As the Son who came into the world
for us*

*As the Spirit ever able to walk
with us*

*May we know your Blessing
Grant us peace*

that surpasses understanding.

Grant us Joy beyond material Possesions

Grant us Love

that knows no bounds

Grant us the Strength

That comes from Faith in You

Now and Always

Amen