

27th December 2020 10 am The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Service led by Emma Latham, Talk by Rob Latham, Prayers by Pam Stote,
Reading by Hamish Blair

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Welcome

[Emma Latham:] Good morning and welcome to St John's.
My name's Emma.

[Rob Latham:] I'm Rob.

[Hamish Blair:] I'm Hamish.

[Pam Stote:] I'm Pam.

[Rob:] And I'm wearing the most ridiculous Christmas hat because I don't have a Santa's hat. And I had to make do and mend with it, so I can take it off now can't I?



[Emma:] It's great to see everybody this morning, and we just really thought we would share with you a little bit about what we have had for Christmas. So does anybody want to share what they've had? Hamish, what have you had?

[Hamish:] Well, I've had a calendar. This is from Dresden. This is Pillnitz castle. And this is just down the road from where our friends live, so they live next door to a castle, just like we do. Isn't that great? This is rather prettier. We have those calendars every year from our friends so that's a lovely reminder.



[Pam:] Well, one of my presents is this

[Emma:] Yes, 'Uke'n Play Ukulele'

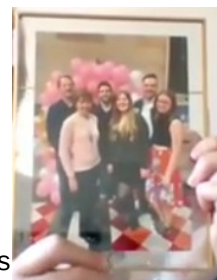
[Pam:] Yes, I've had a ukulele for a little while, but I've only got the first book, and I sort-of run out of tunes to play before I've learnt the chords, or whatever they are. So, yes, so this will help me, I hope, to get a bit further. So if there's anybody else out there who plays the ukulele or if there's any ukulele groups, I'd love to join in when all this is over, all COVID's over.



[Emma:] Lovely! Well, mine is here. This came off my son's fiancée yesterday. And I'm sure you can recognise it. First of all, can you recognise the building? St. John's?

[Hamish:] Look at the floor!

[Emma:] Yes, it's a giveaway. And, yes, this was our family. This is our daughter's 25th birthday party in February. And little did we know, back in February, quite what we'd be doing come Christmas. Yes, that was not quite the last time we were all together, but it feels pretty much like it. Yes, strange Christmas not being able to share like that this year.



[Rob:] And my Christmas present, I'm wearing it, is a nice warm sweater which I had from my mother-in-law. She doesn't always give me nice things, but hey, we can put up with that.



[Emma:] Ooh! I hope she's not watching! So I hope everybody's had a lovely Christmas and I'm sure you're probably all sitting there with something that you've had. And, yes, under these strange circumstances, I hope that you still managed to have a happy and family and joyful Christmas.

Notices

So, anybody got any notices at all?

[Rob:] Just one or two things that I could share, just very briefly,

- There is an evening service tonight at 6pm, same time, same place, and it's an office of Compline, which Felicity is leading, I believe.
- I'd like you all to be ready at the end of service to answer the Christmas quiz I set, which was to place all the jumbled-up events of Christmas in chronological order, which actually isn't as easy as you might think, because I got it wrong the first time I did it, a long while ago.
- And, and just one other thing: I'd like to say two thank-yous.
 - One is a big thank-you to everybody who supported our initiative on Abbey Fields, praying for half an hour on Fridays. We've obviously taken a bit of a break, we didn't meet on Christmas Day, we're not meeting on New Year's Day, but but we are praying on the 8th of January, half past two, Abbey Fields, if you'd like to come and join us. It's all initiated out of praying for COVID and asking the Lord to take the plague away, all that sort of thing, with a big thank-you to everybody who supported that, even if you've not been able to be in the locality.
 - And, last time, I don't think it was Christmas Day, but certainly before Christmas, Andrew said a big thank-you to Michelle about the technology for the services, and it did make me wonder whether anybody ever gives Andrew a thank-you. We've been here two years and we've been very pleased to be part of St. John's Kenilworth and I think probably it's the time with him that made the difference. He's not leading anything today, just to say a big thank-you to him for his endeavours and efforts and all that sort of stuff, so well done, Andrew.

[Emma:] Thank you Andrew.

[Pam:] Thank you.

[Emma:] Well, we'll say Cheerio, and we'll see you later. Okay.

[Pam:] Cheerio for now.

[Hamish:] Bye!

Opening Prayer

[Emma:] Bye. Okay, so shall we just have a moment and we'll start our service and we'll just have a prayer together. Let's just close our eyes for a moment.

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image, and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ, grant that, as He came to share in our humanity. So we may share the life of His divinity, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Carol: Light of the World

1. Light of the world,
You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You

Chorus:

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
All together worthy,
All together wonderful to me.

2. King of all days,
Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above.
Humbly You came to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

Chorus

Bridge:
I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.
I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.

Chorus

Prayer

As we just gather together, we're just going to take a moment just to come before the Lord, perhaps to reflect over these last few days, whatever we've done. Maybe all the joy and the fun that we've had with our family and friends or maybe there's some sadness that we haven't been able to meet with some of our family and our friends this year, but we're just going to have a moment or two of quiet reflection while we just bring ourselves before the Lord. So I'll just open with one or two words.

Christ, the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts. In His light, let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

So, as we just come now,
we're going to just bring to the Lord anything maybe we wish we'd said or we wish we hadn't said,
maybe the things that we've done that we wished we hadn't done,
or perhaps the things that we hoped that we had done and maybe have regretted that we haven't,
or maybe just to give thanks to the Lord.
We just come now before Him, and offer all of those things and ourselves to Him now in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we just give into Your hands, Lord, those things that maybe we're not so proud of, those things that maybe we said in haste, or the things that we did, because we felt under pressure.
Lord, forgive us.

And we pray, Father God, as we start this new day with You, that You will just fill our hearts again, we would know Your forgiveness, we would know Your acceptance, we would know Your love.

Come Lord Jesus, come by your Holy Spirit, and fill us anew and afresh.

May almighty God, who sent his Son into the world to save sinners, bring us His pardon and peace, now and forever.
Amen.

[Rob:] Amen.

Reading: Luke 2:22-40 [NIVUK 2011]

Jesus presented in the temple

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), **24** and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons'.

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **27** Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, **28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'

33 The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.

38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Carol: Joy Has Dawned

1. Joy has dawned upon the world
Promised from creation
God's salvation now unfurled
Hope for every nation
Not with fanfares from above
Not with scenes of glory
But a humble gift of love
Jesus born of Mary

2. Sounds of wonder fill the sky
With the songs of angels
As the mighty Prince of Life
Shelters in a stable
Hands that set each star in place
Shaped the earth in darkness
Cling now to a mother's breast
Vulnerable and helpless

3. Shepherds bow before the Lamb
Gazing at the glory
Gifts of men from distant lands
Prophesy the story
Gold – a King is born today
Incense – God is with us
Myrrh – His death will make a way
And by His blood He'll win us

4. Son of Adam Son of heaven
Given as a ransom
Reconciling God and man
Christ, our mighty Champion
What a Saviour! what a Friend!
What a glorious mystery!
Once a babe in Bethlehem
Now the Lord of history

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

Come to Bethlehem and see
He whose birth the angels sing
Come adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord the newborn King

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

Talk

[Emma Latham:]

Now Rob is going to come and talk to us. So we'll just have a prayer.

Heavenly Father, as Rob comes to talk to us this morning, I pray, Lord, that by Your Holy Spirit You will inspire him, that You will speak through him, that the message that he speaks will resonate with us and in our hearts. Father God, just bless him now we pray, in Jesus' Name.

[Rob:] Amen.

At Christmas when I was a child, we opened our presents in our parents' bedroom, lit by a fire, with great excitement. And then the other exciting part about Christmas was there were always two Christmas parties, either on Christmas Day we would go to my uncle's house and share in one Christmas party, and then the following day on Boxing Day they would come to us. And we'd have two Christmas parties on successive days. And the following year it would work the opposite way round: they would come to us on Christmas Day and we would go to them on Boxing Day. And I remember having a fantastic time. We'd play party games of all sorts of shapes and sizes suitable for children. We wouldn't watch the television - it wouldn't be on at all. We played games like 'Mrs Jones is dead', 'blind man's buff', 'squeak piggy squeak'. And the one that I loved and hated in equal terms was the one that my dad seemed to enjoy particularly, called 'a-hunting we will go'. It was a bit like a barn dance, but hey, it was a fabulous, wonderful time. And that was Christmas. That was it: presents on Christmas Day, two parties on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. In fact, the reason why I mentioned my uncle Peter was because I vividly remember him saying to me one time on Boxing Day evening, towards going-home time for us, I presume we were at his house. And he said, "Well, that's Christmas over for this year." So, for my early childhood, well, throughout my childhood, Christmas was really Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

But actually, there's a whole lot more to Christmas than all of that. It was only really as an adult, and as I got deeper and deeper into my own faith, and then to be ordained, that I began to discover the full richness of Christmas: there are twelve days of Christmas. Last year, again before lockdown, I didn't meet with my sister and her family until into the new year. But we were still celebrating Christmas and wishing each other a Happy Christmas at the same time. And the processes of being ordained has led me into all sorts of other experiences, that actually, if we take away the idea of just celebrating the birth of Jesus and seeing in a bigger context of the incarnation, there's so much more that we add into that.

For instance, the season of Advent becomes much more special, not just because we're preparing for the birth of Jesus but because we're preparing for the return of Jesus, which will kind-of connect with something I shall be saying later. And then of course, we take down our decorations on Twelfth Night, the 5th of January, only to begin another season called Epiphany, in which we come to know who this Incarnate Man is. And that's a different way of looking at how Jesus comes into the world, the public announcement of who He is, at His baptism by John, the coming of the Wise Men, which are not really part of the Christmas story, and shouldn't be part of our crib scene until Epiphany. And here they are in our house, travelling on their journey to the Christmas scene. So a whole lot more. And the problem is, as well, I sometimes think that some of the aspects of that actually did pertain to the birth of Jesus are easily missed. How many Nativity plays have we seen that includes a scene about the circumcision of Jesus? And the role played by a priest that



would go snip snip, in order to do that process, which would make Jesus a true Jewish boy.

And then at the other end of the spectrum, the end of the incarnation season is marked by the presentation of Jesus Christ, which Hamish read for us in our reading just a moment ago. And here we see Jesus being presented as the firstborn son of Mary, because it was required by the Jewish Law, required in order for Him to be redeemed, bought back for God, by the sacrifice of the lamb. So let's just think what the presentation is about. In order to understand it properly, we need to go back into the history of the Jewish faith, way back to the Exodus story. In the Exodus, the crucial moment comes when the Angel of Death will pass over the land of Egypt. We say pass over, but he will actually travel through the land of Egypt. The Angel of Death seeks out the firstborn son of all who is there. But Israelites, because this is an act of God, they are preserved and their firstborn sons are preserved by them taking a lamb, slaughtering it, and then daubing the blood of the lamb on the lintels and doorposts of their homes. So when the Angel of Death comes to Egypt, it passes over them, it ignores them, it leaves alone the houses that are protected by the blood of the lamb.

And from that time onwards, the firstborn son in every Jewish family had to be redeemed, that is, purchased back, bought back. A price had to be paid for Him, so that he could be as a glory to God. The usual sacrifice that was to be offered was an unblemished lamb. But when we come to Mary and Joseph bringing in Jesus for this custom, they aren't able to afford that. And so the offering of the poor people is given instead, two doves or two young pigeons. So this clearly indicates that Mary and Joseph, having moved down to Bethlehem for the census, are now still in a state of poverty. Presumably Joseph is unable to work, and they have to rely on the pittance that they have available to buy the poor sacrifice, but nevertheless Jesus, in that sense, is redeemed.

Of course there's other things that have to be done. It's 40 days after birth that the mother of the newborn child has to present herself, to show that her confinement is complete and the purification ceremony is offered for her. But the key thing is that Jesus is brought, just like one of us, to be offered before the Lord, and the sacrifices are offered.

It's interesting isn't it? Andrew on Christmas Day was stressing the importance of seeing God's DNA that this is God incarnate, the Son of God, carrying the mark of God right from the very beginning. But, in a sense, because the mystery of Jesus is that He is both fully God and fully man, and from that perspective, the Presentation marks Him out as simply as any other Jewish child of that time, that the sacrifice has to be offered. It's always a little bit of a mystery isn't it, that? Why Jesus has to be treated in exactly the same way, even though He is the divine sinless Son of God? You know, that He is God incarnate. In a sense, He's been bought back for God without the necessity of it because there's nothing that can hold on Him. But like so often through the Scriptures, it's important for Jesus to act and show and be treated just like any one of us, or, particularly in this instance, like any Jewish child at the time.

So, the other problem about focusing too much on the Christmas story is that we sometimes obscure the connections that kind-of lead on from here. Of course, we always have to stress the child in the manger is not just there as a pretty baby to celebrate a happy event. But the significance of this is taken on in through His human life, presented to us as a Child who will redeem Himself and all people in the world, offering Himself upon a Cross. And we even get to the point when we get all the way back to Advent, because the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ sits in Heaven, waiting for His second Advent, waiting for His return. And instead of waiting for Christmas, in a sense, we have this continuous Advent, that we are living in a time when we're waiting to rejoice

and be glad that at the end of all things that Jesus will return to bring everything under His feet.

But you know there's something else that we just need to add in to this story of the Presentation, to help us make this significance clear to us and understandable. So, just like in His baptism, where Jesus doesn't want to kind-of show Himself to be any different to any other person, and so submits to a baptism of forgiveness of sin, even though He is the Sinless One, it is in a sense that Jesus is lifted up for us as a representative of us. You see this all points to the significance of how the Cross takes its place in the Christmas story. Because Jesus, we're told by Paul, born into this world, became sin, though He knew no sin, in order that we might become the righteousness of God¹. And in this Christmas story we have a picture of that offering to God of that sinless Man, of that sinless Child, not simply for the rite of the ritual to be done on His behalf, but actually as a representative of us, that even in His infancy Jesus is being presented as the Person, as the Child in this instance, but as the Person, in whom we will find our redemption, and our release from all the sin and wrongdoing.

You know, I made a wonderful discovery in preparing for an Advent service for Knights Meadow this year: the nature of joy. We wish each other, don't we, a Happy Christmas. We say it loud and long. We've surely said it over and over again. But happiness is something that is really rather dependent on other people or the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Happiness is a kind of a one-dimensional word because it depends on how we respond to the things around us and how content we feel. But joy is a much deeper and greater thing. I discovered that the Greek word for joy is *chara* [χαρά], and that the Greek word for grace is *charis* [χάρις]. I'm no Greek scholar. In fact, when I was at theological college I had to have asked my bishop if he'd let me off my Greek lessons because I wasn't getting anywhere very quickly with them, which I'm thankful he did. But *chara* and *charis* must surely be from the same root. And you know, joy is a response to grace. It's the exuberant feelings of overwhelming rejoicing and thankfulness because we have been given grace. Jesus comes into the world as God's gift of grace to us.

Grace? What does that mean? Do you understand the word? Best understood I think, with the words **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**, because in the Cross, and even in the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on His 40th day of life, He is being lifted up in **GRACE** for us and our response is surely a joy that knows no bound, a joy that is excited and exuberant because the love of God is shown to us in this way. It gives us a full comprehension of what Christmas, Epiphany, Advent and indeed the whole of the life of Jesus is about. And it is that joy that we celebrate, that our redemption has come, that Jesus Christ, the answer to the age-old solution of what our problem is, our fault of sin and wrongdoing, is being taken away from us, in order that we might follow Him.

Okay. Here's a final thought. We could say that this is cheap grace, because it costs us nothing, But we'd be wrong, wouldn't we, if we said that. In reality, though, we're not asked to die and be put to death for our own sin because Jesus frees us from that. It does cost us our life, it costs us everything, because we're asked to walk in the way, not of our own choosing, but of the choosing of God. But if we walk in that way, and we trust God for everything, then we know in us, the light, the life and the glory of God will make His home in us, because the Holy Spirit dwelling in us will bring us not less life by the giving of our life, but more: an abundant life, pressed down and overflowing². In this picture of the Presentation, I'm asking you to be presented with Jesus in your hearts and minds before the living God, to receive anew His gift of life, and the blessings of His peace. Let us pray.

1 2 Corinthians 5:21

2 Luke 6:38

Father, we place ourselves again into Your hands this Christmas. May we be presented before you like Jesus with Jesus, under the power of Jesus. So that through His redeeming love, we may be acceptable to You and be filled with Your grace and glory and Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Reflective Carol: A Great And Mighty Wonder

Our next carol is a lovely ancient carol, which I recall singing for the first time in my sponsoring church, many years ago. It's doesn't have the easiest of rhythms, so that you have a choice. You can either use it as a way of reflecting and listen to it and reflect upon the love of God revealed to us in Christmas. Or you can sing along with it and do your best to keep with the times of the verses. it's *A Great and Mighty Wonder*.

1. A great and mighty wonder,
a full and holy cure!
The Virgin bears the Infant,
with virgin honour pure.

Refrain:

Repeat the hymn again:
'To God on high be glory, and peace on
earth to men!'

2. The Word becomes incarnate
and yet remains on high;
And cherubim sing anthems
to shepherds from the sky:

Refrain

3. Since all he comes to ransom,
by all be he adored,
the Infant born in Bethl'em
the Saviour and the Lord.

Refrain

4. And idol forms shall perish,
and error shall decay,
and Christ shall wield his sceptre,
our Lord and God for aye.

Refrain

Intercessions

[Emma:] And we're going to have intercessions now, which are led by Pam.

[Pam:] Let's us pray.

Father God, thank You for the Christmas season. Help us at this time to take on board the true meaning of Your incarnation. Thank You, that You became fully human, as well as fully God. Thank You for Your grace and help us to have the joy of Your Holy Spirit, filling us. Thank You, that You do speak to us and call us to meet with You, just as You did Simeon and Anna. Lord, I confess I'm not as good as they were in recognising You. Please open my eyes and ears, mind and heart to Your voice and help me to listen and obey, because I know Your way is the way of pure love.

Lord, we pray for those places affected by the wind and rain and the gales around our country. Please keep people safe and be with emergency services as they try to help.

We pray for Your world. In so many places, Lord, people are suffering having no home, no food, no security, and then COVID on top of that. Please be with those agencies who are trying to help and show us how to help those agencies.

Thank You for the treatments for COVID which have been developed, and for the vaccine that gives protection. Please be with those scientists who are still working on further developments, with those people who are delivering vaccine. Please be with those who are volunteering to help, as well as those who give ongoing care to those who are in need. Again, Lord, show us what we can do to play our part.

Thank You, Lord, that Brexit seems to have moved forward. Help our nation to relate well to all other nations, so that all governments can work together for the common good. We pray for those who have lost jobs or whose jobs are precarious or more difficult because of Brexit or the COVID restrictions. We pray that the economy in all countries will recover.

Thank You, Lord, for the places where we live. Thank You for the opportunities that there have been recently to get to know our neighbours better. Help us to build on those beginnings to form supportive communities around us. Thank You for the people who have been reaching out with food and friendship, and help us to recognise and respond to those in need of support.

Father God, thank You for our church. And we pray for those who have been working so hard since March to keep services going in totally different ways, and then having to put even more effort in for the run-up to Christmas. This coming week is often a time of rest and relaxation for them. And so we pray that You will fill them with Your peace and refreshing. Help them to realise again how much You value them and love them as Your beloved children, and not just for what they do.

We pray for those who are ill, physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually, and those who are bereaved. Think of those you know about, and in the silence, say their names now.

[pause]

Thank You, Lord, that You know and love these people even more than we do. And that You want them to be made well too. Please bring healing and hope to them all.

Father God, help us to trust that You do hear and answer our prayers, and that You do want the best for us, our friends, our country and Your world. We pray all this in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Answers to Christmas Quiz

[Emma:] Thanks Pam. Right! Well now is the moment we're going to have the Christmas quiz. It should have been posted out, I think, with Denise, so all you young people, you might want to grab it quickly...

[Rob:] Young and old!

[Emma:] and also maybe if you haven't seen the Christmas quiz, you can be thinking or maybe get your Bibles out and have a look and decide what order you think the Christmas events come in, but we're now going to have the definitive version. So let's see how we go.

[Rob:] Right. I think the first thing to say is that we often make a mistake of trying to mix and match the accounts of the birth of Jesus from Matthew and Luke as one single story. Actually they're both telling different stories of different perspectives that only have much smaller touching points than you might imagine, and I hope this will make it clear. I actually have adapted my list in the light of some of the teaching on the Bible study on the web before Christmas. But here we go with a definitive answer.

Well, I get an easy start, because the first thing in the Christmas story is *the prophets tell of the Messiah's birth*. And the second thing is, *Joseph and Mary are betrothed*, they are planning to get married. But then down in Jerusalem, the third part is *An angel appears to Zechariah in the temple, and he tells Zechariah that he is going to be a dad, even though he's very old, and that his wife Elizabeth is going to have a son, and he's to be named John*.

Not very much later than number four is *the angel Gabriel visits Mary, to tell her that she will have a Son by the Holy Spirit*. Shock horror! Mary is not

married, and probably because of that *she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth*. And that's the fifth part of the story. And she resides there for a number of weeks. And probably Mary was still there when *Elizabeth gave birth to the son that she was expecting, and he was named John*.

So we're now in point seven, which is where Joseph gets involved. We can only speculate precisely what Joseph has been thinking. The person he is about to marry has become strangely pregnant. She goes off in a bit of, well, disgrace, I suppose, and he's having to contemplate what he's going to do. And to be honest, he can get a bad press, but he does carefully consider this and wants to be fair to Mary, but he's preparing to put it aside. But the first thing for Joseph, point 7, *Joseph is told that he should still marry Mary*, because it's God's action that has caused her to be pregnant.

And then comes the global announcement that *Caesar Augustus requires everybody to register in a census for the whole of the Roman Empire*. So that necessarily leads to the fact that *Mary and Joseph then have to travel (point 9) to Bethlehem*, which is where Joseph's extended family live, and consequently we don't know how long or precisely when they travel there, but during the time they were there, *Jesus is born of Mary*, and they lay Him in the manger in... we call it a stable, it may just have been a place where they keep the animals within the Jewish household, because that's what they did. So Jesus was born there and then, 11, on that same night, *the shepherds on the hills see an angel to tell of the birth of Jesus*. Of course consequently the shepherds want to go and visit this happening: it's been an exciting thing for their redemption, that's what the angels told them, *so they go and visit the stable and see Jesus*.

Right. The Wise Men do not visit the stable. But we do have to get them involved at some point, so presumably, because the star that they see signifies the birth of a Jewish king, somewhere over in Babylon they see the star around about the time that Jesus is born. It doesn't say it was on His birth day, but it tells of His birth, so that's the next thing, 13 is *the Wise Men see the star*.

But then we'll leave the Wise Men out for a bit because on the eighth day after Jesus is born, He has to be treated like every other Jewish boy, and He has to be circumcised. So *Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day, and given His name, Jesus*. For those who were with us last year, it's Yeshua. The same Sunday last year as I preached in St John's Church, Yeshua. Anyway.

Well, we've just been talking about the Presentation so that's the next thing. *Jesus is taken to the Temple in Jerusalem, where the Jewish customs and requirements under the Law are fulfilled*. Jesus is presented and a sacrifice is offered for Him and Mary is purified. So following that part of the story through the next thing is *Simeon and Anna meet with the Holy Family, and they both prophesy about Jesus* and what His significance means.

And that's really properly the end of the Christmas Story, in terms of the birth of Jesus. Okay, so we have mentioned the Wise Men. So we'd better say how they fit in. Because the next point is *the Wise Men then travel to Jerusalem and confer with Herod*. They travel to Jerusalem because the star does not lead them from Babylon. And they go to the obvious place where you would expect to find a Jewish king, its capital Jerusalem, and they go to the court of Herod, who is all alarmed and fearful that he consults with the scribes about where He is to be born. So that's the next thing, that *Herod consults with the chief priests and the teachers of the Law about where the Messiah is to be born and it's in Bethlehem* and Herod sends them to Bethlehem. It's just then that the star reappears and then guides them the last bit of the journey, a few miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. And so the *Wise Men follow the star* in that final part of the journey, but only that part. And of course to complete the Wise Men story, the next bit of the story is *the Wise Men gave gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh*, and they have a lovely time. Now the interesting thing here is that

Jesus is not in the stable, they go into the house to present their gifts. So it kind-of implies there's a different location, now that the Holy Family is actually residing.

Of course, we know that in the long run Herod turns out to be a bit of a nasty guy, not just the informer. So then *the Wise Men have a dream, and they are told not to go back to Herod as he instructed them to, but they go back to their own land in a different way.* And not very long after that *Joseph again has another dream, and this time he is warned to take Mary and Jesus out, and to flee to Egypt because Herod wants to kill the boy, kill Jesus.* And that's what Herod decides he's going to do. And he sends his soldiers to Bethlehem, that's the 23rd point, *he sends his soldiers to Bethlehem to kill the boys of two and under.* Now that's another clue that indicates why they are two separate stories that we put together, because it could be that Jesus is already a toddler by this point, because it probably took the Wise Men quite a long while to get to Bethlehem. I'm not one of these people think they came on camels across the desert. I think they probably more likely followed the trading routes which would have taken them along the Euphrates-Tigris Valley, up through eastern Turkey, across and down what's called the Fertile Crescent and came down to Jerusalem first from the north, and then went to to Bethlehem from there, so it could have taken them quite a while to do that long journey, probably on horseback, as kings would ride.

And then finally, safe in Egypt, *Joseph and Mary hear that Herod has died.* They then decide that they're going to return. But as they return they hear that Herod's son has taken the throne, and therefore they decide that they should return to Nazareth where they set up, perhaps resume, in the home that they had before they left, and the Holy Family grows, and Jesus becomes known as a Nazarene. So there you have the story.

So very quickly, taking the points on the list that I gave it, you have 5, 22, 18, 2, 16, 9, 4, 6, 11, 12, 14, 21, 23, 24, 1, 19, 25, 15, 7, 17, 10, 13, 20, 3 and 8. If anybody's got it wholly right, let me know via Denise.

[Emma:] Yes, I was going to say if anyone's got 25 out of 25, do let us know, because you did better than I did. Thanks Rob. So we're just going to finish off our service now. I'm going to just finish with a closing prayer and a blessing. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son shared at Nazareth the life of an earthly home, help Your church to live as one family, united in love and obedience and bring us all at last to our home in Heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

[Rob:] So let us continue with prayer.

So, Father God, we ask that You pour out Your blessings upon us. May we know Your peace. And as we stand before You, we ask that You would look on us, as You look upon our Saviour Jesus, who has given His life for us, so that we may have Your blessings always. We ask this in Jesus. Amen

Carol: Joy To The World

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|--|--|
| 1. Joy to the World, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing. | 2. Joy to the World, the Saviour reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy. |
|--|--|

3. He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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A Great and Mighty Wonder – words by St Germanus 634-734, translated from the Greek by J.M Neale (1818-1866). 14th century German melody harmonized by Michael Praetorius 1571-1621
Not to be confused with the German carol, 'Es ist ein Ros entsprungen' (Lo, how a rose e'er blooming), current before the 17th century, which is sung to the same tune.

Joy To The World – words by Isaac Watts 1674-1748 (written 1719), based on Psalms 98 & 96 – Public domain
Sung to 'Antioch' by George Frideric Handel 1685-1759 (published 1848 by Lowell Mason)