

The Christmas Missive – 2020



Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Nancy Castle, Jan Swanson, Thelma Huchthausen, Diane and Roger Ludin and I bring you this service of prayer, scripture and song with love. If you go to our facebook page, you can watch and participate from home: [facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay](https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay) Scroll down until you see today's Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Christmas Eve. No facebook account is needed! The links that follow each hymn will take you to youtube videos of a wide range of people around the world singing those hymns – enjoy them! Please direct any questions or comments to your rector, The Rev. Sidney Symington via: (203) 209-2339 or: sssymington@gmail.com.

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

Hymn 83 – O Come All Ye Faithful vss 1, 3 & 6

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem;
Come, and behold him, born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation;
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God, glory in the highest;

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1wHyMR_SCA

A Reading from the Prophecy of Isaiah – Chapter 52

O captive daughter Zion! You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money. For thus says the Lord God: Long ago, my people went down into Egypt to reside there as aliens; the Assyrian, too, has oppressed them without cause. Now therefore my people shall

know my name; in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I to set them free.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Hymn 89 – It Came Upon the Midnight Clear vss 1, 2 & 4

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold:
Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all-gracious King.
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come with peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats o'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophets seen of old,
When with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold,
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwpT_G2CpVU

A Reading from the Prophecy of Isaiah – Chapter 9

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Hymn 96 – Angels We Have Heard On High

Angels we have heard on high, singing sweetly through the night,
and the mountains in reply echoing their brave delight.

Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why these songs of happy cheer?
What great brightness did you see? What glad tidings did you hear?

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n543eKIdbUI>

A Reading from the Gospel According to Luke – Chapter 2

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she

gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were sore afraid. But the angel said to them, "Fear not; for behold—I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign for you: you will find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among humanity!" When the angels had departed, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, the shepherds made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed. But Mary treasured these words and pondered them all in her heart. The shepherds returned to the fields, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Hymn 79 – O Little Town of Bethlehem vss 1, 3 & 5

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIY58xq5bM0>

O sing to the Lord a new song -- for the grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all, leaving us room to question our worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-aware, creative and godly, not only for religious reasons – which we've seen in our world might mean anything, but because we have had living, breathing proof that such a life will never be in vain.

Religion is sometimes described as having there are two dimensions: the horizontal dimension, which consists of relationships with our fellow human beings and the rest of Creation, and the vertical dimension: our attitude towards whatever ineffably higher power there may be in the universe. (Many of us refer to this power as God.) A lot of believers like to say they place a higher priority on the vertical dimension, calling it the primary focus of life; the real deal. But the salient message of most religious teaching has to do with the horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension is only important because of how it results in human action.

Tonight, we gather to revel in the excitement and wonder at the miracle of a tangible, walking, talking God, who comes alive for us by coming alive in us and as us, even in this most trying of years. Tonight we can find purpose in Jesus' example, we can remind ourselves that a Christian life involves selflessness and sacrifice, we can renew our determination to heal human suffering, seek resolution of human strife, and expand human cooperation. Tonight we mark the day of Jesus' birth as the day we reiterate our common identity as gladly thoughtful, well-intentioned people who believe in the real presence of divinity in the world and in ourselves.

Christmas was not a unique idea of the early Christians – birthday parties were a heathen custom. By contrast, when the Puritans were in charge of England, celebrating Christmas was forbidden by law. In Massachusetts before the Revolution, being caught celebrating Christmas would earn you a jail sentence. You'd better watch out indeed! Boisterous revelry and pagan symbols like brightly decorated trees were thought to taint the soul and distract the true believer from our primary purpose, which was religious purity.

But a religion whose understanding of God does not evolve has little relevance over time. What we have come to know is that purity is

overrated, and smacks of the vertical focus of religion that overlooks the horizontal which matters more. From Psalm 19: “The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge.” Christ is born again this Christmas and every Christmas because God is still communicating with us, still influencing and accompanying us through this life if we will only pay attention.

Tonight is the night for new birth, in our hearts, our communities and our family of nations if only we will hear it. Tonight God offers fresh purpose and new joy to the world, if only we will accept it. Tonight God joins us in a new beginning, a new song, a Merry Christmas song, if only we will sing it .

Prayers

We pray for our world, in the midst of a terrifying pandemic, especially those who are ill and their loved ones. We pray for those who care for the sick, and those who work in science and medicine. Bless their hands and hearts and let them know we are grateful.

We pray for those who have died, especially Don Rose, Richard Leslie, and Doris Hryckvich and their families. May theirs and the souls of all the faithful departed, by your boundless mercy rest in peace.

We pray for the people of St. Peter’s by the Sea, the San Luis Obispo Deanery, and the Diocese of El Camino Real. May we know that our lives are always in your loving care.

Gracious and loving God, we lift up these prayers to you, along with meditations of all our hearts. Calm our fears and anxiety and be with us through these trying months. Help us to understand the changes in our world, to accept the things that we cannot control, to do what we can to slow the virus, and to be patient and loving to one another. All this we ask through Jesus, who is Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gracious God, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

Hymn 111 – Silent Night

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night, son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GUnfLPpjLs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0mgk0KgI0Q>

May the Lord go before you with heavenly light, always and everywhere, that you may perceive with clear sight, act with pure intention and revere one another with true affection. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier remain with you and your loved ones this day and forevermore.