



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, holding a Virtual Service on Sunday November 22nd 2020 at 10:45.

As we are not able to meet in person at present, we hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we all seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

We welcome those who are watching the recording either at our usual worship time of 10.45 or later. The service should be available to watch on Youtube. We also welcome those who are reading this at home.

Our worship today is led by **Colin** who gives us all a warm **welcome**

“Greetings to you all and a very warm welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church for our online service this Sunday morning. If you are watching this at a later time that is fine, if you are joining us for the first time an extra special welcome, we are delighted that you are part of our digital gathering and pray that you will be blessed by God as you immerse yourself in worship of our glorious Lord and Saviour. Let us start our service with a great hymn of praise: Here I am to worship. Please lift your voices and sing the words on screen with oodles of gusto, forget the neighbours, let them hear that Christ is alive and with us in the spirit.”

This version has some additional words, inviting us to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

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.
 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,
 altogether worthy,
 altogether wonderful to me.

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.
 Here I am to worship....

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

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,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.

Call upon the name of the Lord and be saved....
I'll never know..

Tim Hughes, Chris Tomlin
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZc8fRRBXbM> (this is the YouTube link if you wish to use it)

Colin now leads us in **prayer**

Let us pray.

Loving Heavenly Father, You are our magnificent God and Your name is great in all the earth. We echo the words of the Psalmist, who could declare: Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. 'You spoke the worlds into being and stretched out the heavens by the might of Your great power. Again, in the words of the Psalmist: 'When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him? '

And yet, Our Father, You looked down in mercy and grace upon us and sent your Beloved Son to visit us and redeem us. We remember in our service today that he was born, not in a palace surrounded by the pomp and prestige of earthly princes, but in an obscure village, in a lowly manger surrounded by the trappings of poverty and rural toil. We rejoice in Your gracious love and great compassion, and we joy in you our Saviour. We sing Your praises for ever and ever, for You alone are worthy to be praised and worshipped. Thank you, Our Lord, for all the many blessings You have poured out upon us. If we were to try to count them they would be more than we could number, more than the grains of sand on the seashore.

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord forever and ever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We listen (and possibly watch) **Janet**, as she shares our **Bible reading** for today, very familiar to most of us, as she reads the opening verses of Luke Chapter 2.

The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While

they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

May God's word be blessing to each one of us.

We can now listen to, or read, a song that will probably be new to us, No room at the Inn. Those reading this at home may wish to either read the words silently or aloud, or try to find a tune that will fit the words as they read them.

The video, for those who are able to watch it, is a little animation of a song from a Carol Concert performed by the children of Manor Community Primary School, at St Peter and St Paul Church in Swanscombe in December 2015. The choir (of children's voices), are all cartoon penquins, as is the harmonica player! If you are able to, please click the link, otherwise use plenty of imagination!

No room at the inn,
all reservations were made in the spring.
We're full to the brim -
sorry we can't let you in.

No room at the inn,
we're fully booked and the party's in swing.
Please pardon the din -
sorry we can't let you in.
*Mary, Joseph, tell me what you're gonna do,
there is no way you'll be getting bed and breakfast for two.*

No room at the inn,
I'd say your chances are probably slim,
we've not got a thing -
sorry we can't let you in.

No room at the inn,
just take a look at the state that you're in,
say where have you been? -
sorry we can't let you in.
*Mary, Joseph, tell me what you're gonna do,
there is no way you'll be getting bed and breakfast for two.*

No room at the inn,
Everyone's saying the very same thing.
"We'd take anything,
somebody please let us in."

We've room at the inn,
it wouldn't exactly be fit for a king -
here give me your things,
hope you don't mind mucking in.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgqqQ1Jc7o0>

Colin now shares some thoughts on a painting by Holman Hunt entitled 'The Light of the World'

In recent months, our pastor Alec has referred a number of times in his talks to the art of painting, to illustrate various aspects of the Christian life. But what would you say was the most influential painting, or work of art, as far as evangelicals are concerned? I will 'stick my neck out' and dare to suggest that it is 'The Light of the World' by the nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite painter, William Holman Hunt.



It's amazing how often I have heard preachers and teachers refer to this painting. I had the privilege of seeing it again after many years when I went with my younger son to Manchester a few weeks ago, before the start of this current lockdown. While he went shopping, I went to the Manchester City Art Gallery (as you do!) which has, I think, the largest collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in the country. And in the midst of them all is this most celebrated of paintings, though I had forgotten it was housed there. It is, I think, about A3 in size. According to the painter it is an illustration of the text from Revelation 3.20: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' In the painting we see Jesus portrayed as the Light of the World, knocking on the door of a person's heart. Notice there is no handle on the door, as that will be on the inside, showing that the mind or heart can only be opened by the individual person, for Jesus does not invade their personal space or free-will. Also, notice that the weeds in front of the door are overgrown, indicating that this heart's door has long been closed to the Saviour.

In our reading this morning, we are told that Joseph and Mary could not stay at the inn because there was 'No Room' for them. How true this is as a commentary on people today! Yes, they want to celebrate Christmas, and engage with all the pomp and ceremony, and the trappings and trimmings that go with it, but are happy to ignore the true 'reason for the season': the coming of the 'Light of the World', to be born as a baby in Bethlehem's manger. But the birth of the Christ-child means little unless we see it through the lens of Easter and the purpose of his coming – to die on a cross; to be the Saviour of the world, so that as the Risen Christ he can be born in us today through his Spirit. That is the central message of so many of the carols we sing at this time of year. So I pray that as we enter this preparation time for Christmas, with the virus still looming large over our lives, we may take to heart the Saviour as our true Light and Life and Love and Liberty, so that we may rejoice with unspeakable joy at the birth of the Christ-child over 2000 years ago.

We listen to **Joy** as she leads us in our **Intercessory Prayers** today.

Our Heavenly Father, we come before you in the precious name of Jesus. We come as a body of your people into your holy presence, not because we have to but because as your children we want to, to thank you for all your many blessings that you shower upon us day by day. We are surrounded by your goodness and mercy at all times, even though we are not always conscious or mindful of the fact. You love us beyond what we do, caring for us because you created us and came to save us. We praise you for who you are and what you have done for us in your Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Lord, as we enter another week of lockdown, we pray for all the members of our fellowship, families and circle of friends who are suffering with loneliness, anxiety and depression.

Speak to them so they may know that they are not forgotten and so that they feel you close to them at this time upholding and comforting them.

We pray for people at this time who cannot see their family and friends because of lockdown and due to fears around COVID-19. We pray especially for the members of our fellowship who are unable to visit their loved ones in care home, this is made more difficult when communication is limited due to dementia.

We continue to pray for our Health Service and the many doctors/nurses and other staff within the hospital and community setting. Please uphold these staff with your love as they work tirelessly to care for those unwell with this terrible virus and those with other life threatening illnesses. Grant them the patience and perseverance that testify to their willingness to be devoted to the health and well-being of those in their care.

Lord we pray for all the families who have had to say goodbye to their loved ones via a computer screen or phone. Please bring them comfort and grant them peace as they come to terms with the experience they have been through.

We pray for our country and its leaders as they prepare to end this lockdown and consider rolling out the vaccination programme. May they govern wisely and make decisions that are for the good of all. We know that there are many conflicting messages, even within the government, but we ask that ministers may seek only to do what is right, regardless of the effect this decision may have on future votes or the response of the media.

We pray for all those of our fellowship at this time who are ill: those who are weighed down by the burden of the years; those in care homes; those who are awaiting hospital appointments and operations; those who are recovering from operations and still experiencing some discomfort; those who grieve for the loss of loved ones; and those who carry family worries and concerns. You are the Father of all comfort, our Shepherd and Friend, our Healer and Defender, so we pray that you will speak in the midst of their needs and make them aware of the everlasting arms that enfold them in your infinite love and peace.

We pray for the Persecuted Church throughout the world, especially at this time for the Christians in China, as their government is installing facial recognition cameras in churches to monitor believers and ensure sermons follow strict government guidelines. We know that regular attendees at churches face discrimination when it comes to finding employment, financial assistance, and residential permits. We pray that you will overturn the Chinese government's policies against churches so that our brothers and sisters in this great country may feel free to join together in worship and witness as they seek to live for you in their communities.

All these things we ask for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now we can follow a song we have sung many times, that reminds us we are in the presence of God, the Holy One - Be still.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear.
In him no sin is found,
we stand on holy ground.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight
our radiant king of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place:
He comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace -
no work too hard for him,
in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

Songwriters: David Evans
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U>

Colin now shares his message for today with us: No room!

Today, we are starting to look at the actual Christmas story, as told in Luke's Gospel. To anyone of our listeners who has done Bible readings in the past, in Nativity plays and Christmas services, these first seven verses from the second chapter will I'm sure be very familiar to you. I have three headings with three 'H's for us to consider as we delve into these verses. Each points us to an important truth about **the Birth of Jesus**.

First of all, Luke's account points us clearly to the truth that **the Birth of Jesus was Historical**; it was an actual event in history. It is not a cute piece of legend – a nice folk tale for children to act out in their Christmas plays. It is not on a par with the story of Santa Claus. Jesus was born at a specific time and place in history. Luke tells us that his birth occurred in the days of Caesar Augustus, who was the first Roman emperor to wear the imperial purple and crown as sole ruler of the empire. In time he carved out a vast realm marked by peace and prosperity. And yet, Caesar Augustus was never aware of his greatest achievement which was preparing the way for the coming of the Christ-child. He ordered a census to be taken, according to our reading.

In the Roman Empire, censuses were conducted periodically for the purposes of assessing taxation and discovering those who were liable for military service. But as the Jews were exempt from military service, a census in Palestine would be solely for taxation purposes. As far as these censuses were concerned, we have definite information as to what happened in Egypt, which would have been the same throughout the empire, including the province of Syria, where Judaea was a kingdom. The information we have comes from actual documents written on papyrus that have been discovered in the dust heaps of

Egyptian ruins. For example, the following is a record of a census taken in the year AD 104 which contains similar wording to that found in the Gospel: 'From the Prefect of Egypt, Gaius Vibius Maximus. Being that the time has come for the house to house census, it is mandatory that all men who are living outside of their districts return to their own homelands, that the census may be carried out . . . '.

This time the date is 4 or 5 BC and Herod the Great is king of Judaea, according to Matthew's Gospel. So this census in Luke's account must have taken place probably shortly before Herod's death in April 4 BC. Because of this, some historians have questioned whether Luke has got his facts correct, for Quirinius or Cyrenius did not actually become the official governor of Syria until AD 6. However, the Bible never actually calls him the governor as such. The Greek says he was 'governing' in Syria. And we know that Quirinius was indeed ruling in some capacity in this region at the time. His name is mentioned in official records placing him as proconsul as early as 12 B.C. So, Luke's account can be trusted with absolute confidence, testifying to the fact that God's plan of salvation was a perfectly synchronized program of events that centred on the Saviour's birth in Bethlehem. The Apostle Paul in Galatians 4 tells us 'when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.' In other words, Jesus came exactly at the right time. And God's careful planning remains true even in our own day. There is so much we don't understand, for example, about the global scene, such as the coronavirus, but we can rest in the sure and certain hope that whatever happens to us as individual Christians, God will fulfil his purpose in and through us to his honour and glory, for we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Before we were born...before even the creation of all things, God had prepared a place for us in the world to come and had planned events accordingly. Wow! No wonder, Paul was mesmerised in his Letter to the Romans by the foreknowledge and foreordination of God, for our puny minds cannot begin to comprehend our place in the eternal plans of Almighty God. Like the Apostle, we too must limit our thoughts to the sublime truth that he loved us with an everlasting love and through his grace he led us to know that love in a deep and personal way. Hallelujah!

My second heading is that not only was the birth of Jesus historical but it was also **heralded**, for it was prophesied in the Old Testament. So, his birth was not only carefully planned, but the key details of it were communicated to his people through his messengers. The Hebrew prophet Micah declared, 700 years before the coming of the Messiah that He would be born in Bethlehem, Judah, in the birth-place of David. 'But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity' (5:2).

Fast-forward seven hundred years and a betrothed couple, descendants of King David, is living in Nazareth, Galilee, 80 miles away from Bethlehem. Mary is due to give birth, and going to Bethlehem near Jerusalem is no doubt far from Joseph's mind, away from family and friends who would be able to help with the birth. No doubt it never entered his mind that they would need to go to Bethlehem. How can God get her to Bethlehem on time? But God's timing is always perfect, even though we may think that He is cutting it pretty close this time? Because if Jesus were born in Nazareth he would be an illegitimate messiah and an impostor of the throne of David. And as a result it would have been impossible for Him to be our Saviour.

When we examine the details we find that there is a unique set of historical circumstances that bring about the fulfilment of the prophecies related to the birth of Christ. For the

observant person it is amazing how the sovereign hand of God brings it all together in perfect timing. He is the God of history, and He is in control of every detail. Sometimes we think He is dragging His feet, yet He knows with absolute perfection every detail of the events along the way and the people whom He chooses to use to accomplish His eternal purpose. How tragic that we get so busy with our plans, schedules and arrangements that we fail at times to see His perfect timing even in our own lives as Christians.

Our third heading is that the Birth of Jesus was **Humble** – the epitome of humility. In the greatest time in history God turned to a peasant Jewish couple in Nazareth, Galilee of the Gentiles. You know what men thought of Nazareth. Thirty years later Nathanael laughed, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? 'Did God made a mistake? For why did he choose two people without name, rank, wealth, education, political influence, or anything else in terms of this-worldly authority. You see, I guess most people would expect the Messiah to be born in a palace, into a royal family, surrounded by all the pomp and majesty of a great kingly dynasty, like Herod's. Certainly, the Wise Men thought as much, because according to Matthew's Gospel they went immediately to Jerusalem the capital and knocked on the palace doors of King Herod, asking after this new-born king.

And yet the truth of the matter is that for the vast majority of people their existence is marked by poverty and humility; they pass their days amid the burden and toil of scarcity and suffering. As the Saviour of the world, Jesus did not come to be treated as a special person, deserving of all the benefits and comforts which the wealthy enjoyed at that time. No, he was born into poverty, in solidarity with the common man, with the meek and lowly, those who know the hardships of this life. When he became of age he worked in his adopted father's carpentry or building trade – hardly the foundation of greatness and glory in the eyes of the world. That is why Jesus could relate genuinely and wholeheartedly to the rejects of the day, to the human 'flotsam and jetsam 'who walked the highways and byways of first-century Palestine: to the lepers and demon-possessed, to fishermen and tax-collectors, to the poor and disabled, the blind and the beggars – and, of course, to sinners.

And so we are told that Jesus was born in a stable, not in a palace; placed in a feeding trough for feeding animals, not a pretty cot or a cosy cradle in the palace of a king. The greatness of the event is the person who is at centre stage. This is the Messiah, the Anointed of the LORD who is being brought down to save His people from their sins. The apostle Paul tells us 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.'

Again, we are told that 'there was no room in the inn.' The 'inn 'was not a Premier Inn, or a five-star hotel where you would want to take your family on holiday. These 'inns 'were the most basic of living spaces. Travellers provided their own food. The innkeeper was expected only to provide a fire to cook food on and give warmth, as well as hay for the animals in the stable and enclosure. The town was crowded because of the census, and there was no room for Joseph and Mary. And so, we are told, Mary and Joseph camped in the stable. The innkeeper was not cruel or inhospitable; he simply didn't have any room left. This poor couple had no relatives in the town. As far as we can determine, they were all alone and completely dependent upon God to provide for them. Nevertheless, at end of the day Mary and Joseph could say that God provided all that they needed.

But 'no room in the inn 'became prophetic words pointing to the fact that 'He came unto His own and His own received Him not' (John 1.11). And so the question, Is there room in my life for Jesus?, comes ringing down the centuries to our own age. Because there are people

who never welcome Jesus, not because of hatred toward Him, but simply because their hearts are already overcrowded even at Christmas time with thoughts of wealth and work, possessions and pleasure. They have no room for spiritual things, no room for Jesus. No time to reflect on His will, no desire to go out of their way to do what will please Him. Maybe some other day, but not today. They live DIY lives in a DIY way!

What is my attitude as a Christian toward Jesus? Do I crowd him out of my heart by the way I live? Do I say by my life-style, behaviour and thinking 'no room'? Come back another day when you do not interfere with my goals and desires. I'm sorry but you really don't fit into my plans at present; I really would like to have you in my life fully one day when it's a bit more convenient. I want what I know is best for me. Sorry, but 'no room' at the moment; I'm too busy!

That verse in the Book of Revelation, illustrated by the painter William Holman Hunt, makes it very clear that Christ wants to be an important part of our lives and make Himself permanently at home in our hearts, to be Lord in every sense of the term. He doesn't want us to wait for some more convenient time, but right now, today, right where we are, he is looking to fill our hearts and lives with his Spirit, so that in the days, weeks, months and years ahead we may bring glory and honour to his wonderful Name and his all-sufficient grace. Amen.

We bring our time together towards a close by listening or reading the words and music to another song that echoes the message we have just heard: No room for the baby. Some of you may know this from many years ago, it was first written by Hilda Day and is in a CSSM hymn book dating from the 1950's, but it was new to me! This recording is played on a Bechstein Grand Piano in St Austell, in Cornwall.

No room for the baby at Bethlehem's inn,
only a cattle shed;
no room on this earth for the dear Son of God,
nowhere to lay his head.
Only a cross did they give to my Lord,
only a borrowed tomb.
Today he is seeking a place in your heart-
will you still say to him, 'No room'?

O Lord, in my heart there's a welcome for you:
gladly I now would say,
"Come in, precious saviour, my heart and my life
both shall be yours today.
Long have you waited and long knocked in vain
outside my heart's closed door:
so cleanse me from sin, then, my Lord, enter in
and live there for evermore."

Hilda M Day

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_G4ZMryt08

Finally Tim brings our worship to a close as we share **the Grace** together.
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore, Amen.