



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, holding a Virtual Service on Sunday November 29th 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 service today, the **first Sunday in Advent**, is led by **Tim, who welcomes** us: as the screen shows a picture of a lighted candle:

“A very warm welcome to you wherever you’re watching for our online service on 29 November, the first Sunday of Advent. Normally we would be lighting today the first of our advent candles – and maybe we’ll be able to do that next week at the chapel. But may this little candle remind us today of Jesus, the light of the world, coming to this Earth and bringing us hope in our darkness and need. And let’s lift our hearts and voices to the God of glory who sent Jesus into the world as we share our first song together.”

...and **introduces our first song**, one we have sung in the past but possibly some time ago now! Those who remember it may recall that the men sing ‘In power resplendent’ with the ladies providing an echo, although that could be challenging to sing at home alone!

Song: God of Glory:

God of Glory, we exalt your name,
you who reign in majesty;
we lift our hearts to you,
and we will worship, praise and magnify
your holy name

In power resplendent
you reign in glory,
Eternal King, you reign forever.
Your word is mighty,
releasing captives;
your love is gracious,
you are my God.

Dave Fellingham Copyright@Thankyou music. CCL no 5664

<https://youtu.be/agsmHYF8axc> This is the internet link if you want to watch the video and have access.

Tim leads us in a brief **prayer**

Lord God, we really want to praise you and worship you this morning. You are the awesome, eternal king of the universe, who made our world in all its wonder. We

recognise that you are the rightful ruler of the world and our lives. But we also recognise that none of us have given you your rightful place in our lives – we have each gone our own way and left you out of the equation. Yet, we thank you today that your love still extends to us, and you've not treated us as we deserved, but dealt with us with grace. So much so that you sent your son Jesus into the world to rescue us and make it possible for our relationship with you to be restored, because he took the punishment that our rebellion deserved. And now we can know you and even be part of your family. How we praise you and thank you for Jesus, the light of the world, and for your word, the Bible, which reveals him to us. **Amen.**

**Debbie shares our Bible reading:
Luke Chapter 2, 8-20**

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

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

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

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."

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

Thanks be to God

We can now join in a very familiar Christmas Carol - perhaps the first one this year!!!

You may want to sing it or read it aloud or silently.

Carol: While Shepherds Watched:

While shepherds watched their flocks by night
all seated on the ground,
the angel of the Lord came down
and glory shone around.

"Fear not," he said, for mighty dread
had seized their troubled minds;
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and all mankind."

"To you in David's town this day
is born of David's line,
the Saviour who is Christ the Lord

and this shall be the sign."

"The heavenly Babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
and meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
and in a manger laid."

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
appeared a shining throng
of angels praising God, who thus
addressed their joyful song:

"All glory be to God on high
and to the earth be peace;
goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
begin and never cease
Nahum Tate CCL no 5664

<https://youtu.be/TvegJ3wRLFE>

This is the internet link if you want to use it.

If you click on this next link, you will be transported to the field near Bethlehem where it is thought the angels appeared to the shepherds that first Christmas.

The Shepherds' Field: https://youtu.be/y_YibSZU4dc

Jane now leads us in our prayers.

Father, we come to worship you today for who you are and for all your great blessings to us. Even in these dark times your created world around us lifts our souls in praise to you, whether we are able to take a walk in the park or just look out of our windows at the birds and the trees. Thank you that you are all around us – help us to perceive you more in the everyday things of life.

We pray for our world. We give thanks for the news that a number of vaccines have been produced to tackle the coronavirus, due to the dedicated work of scientists, collaborating across national boundaries. We pray that the vaccines may soon be released for use and that the most vulnerable would be protected first, including those living in countries much poorer than our own, who don't have the benefit of a national health service. We continue to pray for all doctors, nurses and other health workers everywhere, particularly those at our Royal Blackburn Hospital, who continue to love and care in the face of unprecedented workloads. May you give them strength and resilience and keep them safe.

We pray for our country. As we approach Christmas, Father, help us to remember that it is the season to celebrate the birth of your Son and that will never change, no matter what things we have to forego this year. Thank you for our government, trying to give us some leeway to celebrate together, but we pray that everyone would be cautious and mindful of others in everything they do. We pray especially for those who will be alone, for those who are struggling due to loss of income, for those who have been bereaved, for those who cannot see a way out. We pray for our churches, that the message of Jesus, God with us,

would be proclaimed throughout the land to bring hope and peace; we ask that you would prepare the hearts of many to hear your word of Good News and, like the shepherds, they would seek you and find Jesus. We pray for the people of the Galligreaves area, that they too would have open hearts. Help us as we try to reach out to them in a small way and make us receptive to them, whatever their needs may be. We pray for the children of the estate, that you would keep them safe and help them to understand what Christmas is really all about. Give hope and strength to their teachers too at this difficult time.

We pray for ourselves and our fellowship together. Heavenly Father, help us to love one another with the love that you have given us, to support and care for each other, thinking of others and not just ourselves. We pray also for our families, our neighbours and our friends; prompt us to bring a word in season to them. We ask for your peace and healing for those we know who are sick; bring your love and joy to those who are in care homes and to those who are caring for others; give hope to those who are struggling in any way. Whenever any one of us is feeling down, may we look to the skies and see your glory and grace in the face of Jesus, born as a baby lying in a wooden manger but, as a man, dying on a wooden cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sin.

We ask all our prayers in His precious name, **Amen**

We have the opportunity to **lift our voices in song**, or read, or watch as we prefer, a carol by Graham Kendrick. It may be familiar, although the last time we sang it was probably in the old Leamington Road building.

Song: Look to the Skies, There's a Celebration:

Look to the skies, there's a celebration,
lift up your heads, join the angel song,
for our Creator becomes our Saviour
as a baby born!

Angels, amazed, bow in adoration
'Glory to God in the highest heaven!'
Send the good news out to every nation
for our hope has come.

Worship the King - come, see his brightness,
worship the King, his wonders tell.
Jesus our King is born today
we welcome You, Emmanuel.

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God
Father for ever, the Prince of Peace,
there'll be no end to Your rule of justice
for it shall increase.

Light of Your face, come to pierce our darkness,
joy of Your heart come to chase our gloom,
star of the morning, a new day dawning,
make our hearts your home

Worship the King - come, see his brightness...

Quietly he came as a helpless baby,
one day in power he will come again -
swift through the skies he will burst with splendour

on the earth to reign.
Jesus, I bow at Your manger lowly,
now in my life let Your will be done,
live in my flesh by Your Spirit holy
till Your kingdom comes
Worship the King - come, see his brightness..

Graham Kendrick
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<https://youtu.be/Ke3EXG1828E>

Tim now shares his talk on Luke 2: 8 – 20: **Simple Yet Significant**

Introduction

Wise people have often observed that the simple things in life are free. Sometimes those simple things are the best things, things we really appreciate – smiles, laughter, happy memories, a good sleep, the smell of flowers, receiving a letter, saying thank you to someone. They bring us much satisfaction and many times, too, simple things, as well as being good, can be significant and important.

In today's passage in Luke, in some very familiar words, we see Luke, the brilliant and accurate historian, presenting the facts he'd established in a simple and clear way. He tells a simple story – yet those simple facts express some deeply significant truth.

We could title our talk today 'simple yet significant' and we'll see simple yet significant people, a simple yet significant message, a simple yet significant song and a simple yet significant response.

Simple Yet Significant People (verses 8 and 9)

In verses 8 and 9 we meet some simple men doing their job. Not to say that being a shepherd is a simple task – shepherds today and then are hard-working, skillful people with much practical knowledge (if you don't believe me, read 'The Shepherd's Life' by James Rebanks). But in those days, the job of a shepherd was looked down upon and those who did it would be seen as being on the lowest rung of society's ladder. They didn't receive much respect. The work they did made them 'ceremonially unclean' so they could not participate in the religious activities of their people and they were so little trusted that they were forbidden from testifying in a court.

These were simple, humble men, yet it's in their lives that God intervenes, once again through the work of angels, much to their amazement and terror. The Greek words at the end of verse 9 are 'phobeo' (from which we get our word 'phobia' – something we're very scared of) and 'megas' – which doesn't need much translation. They were 'mega scared'! And no wonder. When people in the Old Testament experienced the 'glory of the Lord' – the signs of the presence and majesty of God – it literally floored them.

But why did God choose to reveal his presence and announce his message to shepherds at all? Well, first of all, these were men who might have been simple, but were hard-nosed – they wouldn't have been easily fooled. If they told other people about what they'd seen and heard and been convinced by, then that was really saying something about its credibility. Their society might not have trusted them to be witnesses, but God did.

It shows us something, too, about the character of God – he, in his wisdom, often chooses to work through simple people and with simple tools – read 1 Corinthians 1 verses 18 – 31.

And that's significant and encouraging for us – I may be nothing special, but I can be assured that God wants to speak to me.

Perhaps most importantly, it was significant that these simple shepherds were the first to hear of the birth of Jesus: Jesus, who later described himself as the Good Shepherd who was prepared to lay down his life for the sheep and whom John the Baptist, the promise of whose birth we've read about in Luke already, was to describe as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world'. These very shepherds were likely the ones who were looking after the lambs raised for the sacrifices in the temple, so how appropriate that they hear the news first.

A Simple Yet Significant Message (verses 10 to 12)

To these simple yet significant people is revealed a wonderfully simple yet significant message which we read in verses 10 to 12. First, they were told that their fear was unnecessary, as they were not being condemned, but were being brought good news, joyful news. What was this good news?

It was a simple message, one contained in two verses, in a couple of sentences spoken by the angel. It doesn't need a theology degree to get to grips with it! Let's have a look at this simple message:

- It was a **personal** message – see how, three times, the angel says it's '*to you*'. God is not some remote figure who is uninterested in our lives and our struggles – he speaks to us personally
- Yet, although it was a personal message for the shepherds, it was also for **people everywhere** – it 'will be for all the people' says the angel. So who does that include? Everyone, all over the world, all through time – you and me. We mustn't ignore it
- It was also a **practical** message – the message was that the shepherds were getting just what they needed – a 'Saviour has been born'. They knew that their lives were not right in God's sight – that was why they were so afraid when they experienced God's presence – they knew they weren't fit to be in his sight, because their lives didn't measure up to his standards. If we're honest, the same could be said of all of us – we've messed up in so many ways, and try as we might, we can't put things right for ourselves. So what we need is help from outside ourselves – a saviour, a rescuer who *can* put us right with God
- It was a **planned** message. This was no last-minute change of heart from God. It was what he had planned from before the beginning of time and had revealed in his promises all through history – and the names that the angel uses for this saviour makes this clear. The shepherds would have recognised these names well. He was the 'Christ' – the Greek word for the 'Messiah', the promised 'chosen and anointed one' whom God had always said would come, and had said would come to this very place of Bethlehem, the town of David. And he is 'the Lord' – the Greek word 'kyrios' which is the word used in the Greek version of the Old Testament over 7000 times to refer to God himself. This baby was no ordinary baby – he was the Messiah – God himself in human shape!
- And although it was a planned message it was also a **present** message – 'Today' the saviour is born – it's really happening, it's now!

The angel shares a simple, yet so significant, message of good news. There's a personal God who says to you and me and people everywhere that he's sending a saviour like he always planned – and here he is, being born at this specific point in history in Bethlehem. Have you ever heard and understood this message? Like the shepherds were in verse 12, we're being clearly pointed in the direction of the saviour.

A Simple Yet Significant Song (verses 13 and 14)

After this simple yet significant message, we read about a simple but significant song in verses 13 and 14, as the first angel is joined by a great many others. In 1 Peter 1 verses 10 to 12, we get a fascinating little insight into how angels think. Peter is discussing God's great plan of salvation and he says that it was revealed by the prophets and announced by the apostles, but then he says that angels would love to study it. The angels are amazed by what God was doing, how he cared about people so much – 'men on whom his favour rests' – that he was prepared to step into our world and become a little baby in a manger so that people like us could be saved. That amazement turns into a simple shout or song of praise to God - 'glory to God in the highest', with a focus on the peace that men can know.

The shepherds lived in the Roman world, which talked a lot about peace – the 'Pax Romana' or 'Roman peace' was a much-celebrated benefit of the order imposed by the Romans. But the absence of war is not the same as true peace, as we know. A philosopher of the time, Epictetus, said 'While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than even for outward peace'. The song of amazement that the angels sang celebrated that what the emperor was powerless to do, God can! True peace is possible because of what God has done in Jesus, even in the most troubled of times!

A Simple Yet Significant Response (verses 15 to 20)

The question for the shepherds (and for us) is how we will respond to the simple message the angels brought to them. Let's look at how the shepherds responded in verses 15 to 20.

It was a simple response. In verse 15 we see that, having been told what was happening and what to look for, they just said, "OK, then – let's check it out and see if it's true". They didn't have to do that – they could have just stayed in the fields – but they decided to make the effort that it took to go and investigate. They did what has been described as the first 'Christmas rush' – hurrying off to Bethlehem as we read in verse 16 and they found Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The word for 'found' in verse 16 doesn't just mean 'stumbled over or found by accident' – it means 'found by searching' – they knew what they were looking for, but they had to be prepared to put in some yards to find the baby. But find him they did, in a manger, exactly as they had been told (v 20). The message from God was one that could be trusted.

What about you? Are you prepared to take God at his word? To come and see if this message about Jesus is really true? Maybe you're hearing and understanding this message for the first time – if that's the case, be like the shepherds – check it out for yourself.

Or maybe you've already done that – maybe you've already found Jesus and know he's real and all that God said. If so, you can learn from the rest of the shepherds' response. In verse 17 and 18 we read that they 'spread the word' – seemingly told lots of other people who got to hear the astounding news. We should do that too – maybe you can give others this Christmas something to think about - like Mary did in verse 19. And then, in verse 20, the shepherds left their simple lives and went off on a world preaching tour. Actually, no, they didn't – they 'returned' – back to being shepherds, back to the life they knew, but glorifying and praising God in the place where he had put them. We can do the same!

The shepherds' response was simple obedience, but significant in the lessons it teaches us, whether that's about meeting Jesus for the first time, or spreading the news about him to others in the situations that God has placed us in.

We bring our worship towards a close as we sing, read , watch or listen to another Graham Kendrick song, associated perhaps more with Easter than Christmas,

Song: Come and See:

Come and see, come and see,
come and see the King of love,
see the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears.
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer
as he lifts the cruel cross,
lone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill.

We worship at your feet,
where wrath and mercy meet,
and a guilty world is washed
by love's pure stream.
For us he was made sin,
Oh, help me take it in,
deep wounds of love cry out 'Father, forgive.'
I worship, I worship
the Lamb who was slain.

Come and weep, come and mourn
for your sin that pierced him there,
so much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail.
All our pride, all our greed,
all our fallenness and shame,
and the Lord has laid the punishment on him.

We worship at your feet....

Man of heaven, born to earth
to restore us to your heaven,
here we bow in awe beneath
your searching eyes.
From your tears comes our joy,
from your death our life shall spring,
by your resurrection power we shall rise.

We worship at your feet.....

Graham Kendrick
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<https://youtu.be/ejCIBRsvkUM>

This is the internet link should you wish to use it.

Tim closes our service as he shares a **Blessing**:

May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, may the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you his peace. **Amen**

For those with internet access, here's a little bonus, spoken by Dai Woolridge, a Welsh farmer. If you are able to watch it, you'll hear that its spoken as a poem, and filmed on the farm - here is the essence of it.

Mess. It's just one word. One syllable that brings to mind a whole load of images... messy ones! And at Christmas time, this one messy syllable word seems to shift into top gear! I remember when I was young, my brother and I would tear through our festive wrapped gifts as if we were competing in an Olympic sport (winter Olympics of course). I think of the post-Christmas dinner-plate pile-up in the kitchen and the décor of celebration wrappers between the sofas (the Malteser ones!)

It's fair to say there was a fair bit of mess at the very first Christmas too. As Mary and Joseph trekked down to Bethlehem for a census, there was no room for them to stay. So the young couple welcomed Jesus into the world, with a bunch of animals as his roommates (some scholars claim it was almost as bad as living with students). But Jesus didn't just enter the mess of a downstairs room with a feeding trough, he entered the mess of our world too. It was a message that has been posted in verses throughout scripture, one will come to fix up the mess. And if we invite him, he even enters the mess of our lives and offers to fix us.

The Christmas story involves Mess, but it's not the central story. It's about the one who was born in the Mess. You see 'Mess 'is only central to the Christmas story when it's an abbreviation. There's 3 letters added to the Mess - i.a.h. and those letters change everything.

<https://youtu.be/kWmvu3cEBmM>

Do watch if you can.

We hope that next Sunday, December 6th, Bethesda Chapel will be open for those who wish to worship there, but you may wish to check beforehand!