



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, meeting at Bethesda Chapel, on Sunday December 27th 2020 at 10:45.

For those 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 is led by Colin, with Joy playing the piano for us before the service.

It begins with **Colin giving us a warm welcome:**

"Greetings to you all on this last Sunday of 2020, as we look forward to the New Year and God-willing to a time when 'We'll meet again, Don't know where, Don't know when, But I know we'll meet again some sunny day.' That is, all our members meeting together under one roof, able to sing with gusto the Songs of Zion, knowing that all thoughts of a lockdown will be well and truly behind us, a thing of the past.

As we are still very close to Christmas Day, I thought we could commence with the carol, "Hark the herald angels sing".... I have chosen this one, not least because the lines 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see. Hail, the Incarnate Deity. Pleas'd as Man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel' fits in very nicely with our theme this morning."

Hark the Herald Angels Sing:

Hark the herald angels sing:

"Glory to the new-born King!

Peace on earth, and mercy mild,

God and sinners reconciled."

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,

join the triumph of the skies;

with th' angelic host proclaim,

"Christ is born in Bethlehem."

Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the new-born King!

Christ by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, the incarnate Deity:
pleased, as man, with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!

Hail! the heaven-born
Prince of peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die:
born to raise the son of earth,
born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

<https://youtu.be/gRU01731REg>

This version David Doty Music,
Charles Wesley/Felix Mendelssohn
CCL no 5664

Colin leads us in prayer:

"Our Father God, we thank you for sending your Son to earth so you could redeem us. When we think of the extent to which You were willing to go in order to save us, it makes us want to shout and sing, to celebrate and cry with thankfulness. You love us so much, and we are so grateful for that love. Without you, we would still be lost and in sin. But because of everything you have done for us, today we are free; our lives are blessed; Jesus is our Saviour and Lord; Heaven is our home; and Satan has no right to control us. We will be eternally grateful to you for everything you have done to bring us into this wonderful position of blessing! We pray this in Jesus' name! Amen"

Colin leaves the platform to pick up a large black plastic bin bag, and begins to talk - but is reminded to use a microphone - so takes the bag back to the lectern, then thinks again and once more comes down to the front by the other steps this time, to the stand microphone!

'**The Black Bin Bag**' - Can the remains of your Christmas be placed in a black plastic bin bag? Ready for the refuse collection in the next two weeks. When you consider what some people have spent on the big day, in terms of presents, food and booze,

not to mention all the decorations, and everything else that goes to make up a big bonanza of a Christmas Day, can the warm fuzzy feelings inside afterwards, if not a headache, make up for the huge expenditure and possibly an increase in indebtedness? In his Letter to the Romans, Paul tells the Christians in that great city that 'the kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink, but in righteousness and peace and joy.' For many people in our land, Christmas is little more than Xmas; an excuse to celebrate and nothing more than that. As Christians it is the Christ of Christmas that truly matters - He is the reason for the season - for the festival celebrates the coming into this world of our Saviour and, through his life and death, the coming of salvation. So the true gift of Christmas is the gift of God's Son, born in Bethlehem, for you and for me. I hope you have had a great Christmas, because not only have you celebrated the gift of Jesus but also the gift of new life through him. In this sense every day could be Christmas day for the Christian, because we have a '10 000 Reasons' to rejoice and be glad, for the Redeemer has indeed come. But I'm not too sure I'd want to eat Christmas pud and brandy sauce every day!

Colin now shares the notices, reminding the congregation of the "virtual coffee" via Zoom at 1pm today, and the virtual prayer meeting at 7.30pm on Thursday evening, again via Zoom. Details of the login are sent via email, but we hope to encourage those without the internet to be able to join us via a telephone link soon, look out for more information.

Time for another carol: In the bleak midwinter. The one shown on the screen at Bethesda is sung by Geraldine Latty, who sang our last Carol on Christmas Day. Once again she has a piano accompaniment.

In the bleak mid-winter
frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron,
water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow,
snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him
nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away
when He comes to reign:
in the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed,
the Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels
may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim
thronged the air,
but only His mother
in her maiden bliss,
worshipped the Beloved
with a kiss.

What can I give Him,
poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
yet what I can I give Him,
give my heart.

<https://youtu.be/RThaildsE80D4>

Words Christina Rossetti.

This version @Geraldine Latty/Carl Luca 2020, used by permission of Engage Music
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Joy now comes to the microphone to lead us in our Prayers of Intercession:

“Our loving, heavenly Father, we thank you for this season of Christmas and the angelic message to the shepherds of peace and goodwill to all people of the world. We thank you for Jesus, for his coming to be our Saviour. This is truly a remarkable Christmas gift, the greatest of all gifts, the benefits of which still pour down to us in abundance thousands of years later, for he came to give us eternal life in all its fulness. Jesus is the Light of the world, who is able to enlighten our hearts and minds with the truth of your love and forgiveness. We thank you that you have illuminated our lives with your Spirit; so we pray that many who are walking in darkness at this time will also come to see in Jesus, the Prince of Peace, their only hope of a fulfilled life, one that can be experienced now and forever.

We pray for our country and indeed our world at this time, so stricken by this Covid virus and its mutations. As our Queen highlighted in her Christmas Day speech to the nation, there are many who are feeling the grievous effects of isolation and loneliness in this traditional season of collective rejoicing and who yearn for the renewal of physical contact. We pray especially for our elderly relatives who are shut up in care homes and for their loved ones who cannot see them directly or greet them with a kiss or hold their hands, that as we face this new year together we may start to see this affliction removed from our midst, so that people may once again meet without

restriction. We thank for all those who work in our hospitals and care homes, who are willing to risk their own health for the sake of caring for their patients and residents. Keep them safe from this pandemic, we pray. We also thank you for the many scientists who have worked hard to solve the riddle of this virus, in order to find a cure and to produce safe and effective vaccines. As the vaccination programme is being rolled out, may people see in their inoculations the answer to the prayers of a concerned nation and willingly give you all the praise and all the glory.

We also bring before you those of our own fellowship who need our special prayers at this time. Those indeed who are in care homes who may feel forgotten; those who are feeling the burden of the years and suffering from the effects of ageing diseases; those who are mourning the loss of loved ones; those who are recovering from operations and treatment and those who are still waiting to go into hospital for surgery; those who are sick and in pain at this time, whether because of illness or an accident; those who are weighed down with family worries and concerns; and those who have relatives and friends who have been made unemployed as a result of the lockdown and face an uncertain future. 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 that they are truly embraced by your infinite love and peace, that they may yet return to praise you for everything that you are and everything that you do for them, and indeed for us all, for answers to prayer and the promise of your daily protection from the evil one. All these we ask for the sake of the one who was, is and ever shall be your well-beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."

Jane now reads our Bible passage, Philippians 2, 5-11

'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

Thanks be to God.

This reading can inly be followed by one song - The Servant King, to be sung by Esther, (who has the words with her this time) and sings unaccompanied , well done Esther!

From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give Your life that we might live.

This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.

There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear,
His heart with sorrow was torn
'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said.

This is our God, the Servant King....

Come see His hands and His feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice:
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

This is our God, the Servant King....

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone Him
Each other's needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God....

Graham Kendrick
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Colin share his Message: 'The Servant King'

Once again, Christmas has raised the question: 'Who was this Jesus Christ whose birth we have just celebrated, especially this year given the fact that Covid-19 is still on the rampage?' I mean, many other events have been cancelled, including weddings, because of the risks involved. But not Christmas. One person in his 40s or 50s who was asked what he knew about Jesus Christ replied: 'He was a religious geezer thousands of years ago who thought he was special, but was killed by the authorities for being a rebel.'

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians, the Apostle explains the meaning of Jesus' coming into this world. And what an amazing passage this is, this 'Hymn to

Christ', as some Christians call it, for in its lines we find some incredible statements. If you want a Christmas creed, a Christmas statement of belief, this is it!

There are four things this passage teaches us about Jesus and four things we must understand and apply to our own lives as Christians, because the context of these verses, **Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus**, makes it very clear that Jesus sets us an example to follow. You might want to say, 'I can't have the same mind Jesus had; He was God, I'm not.' That is certainly true, but as his disciple, someone who has been blessed with his Spirit, you can have the same attitude towards other people, and that attitude will drive your actions. So, here in verses 6-11 we find the Christ-like principles that apply to your life and mine as Christians.

Jesus, the Servant-King:

He gave up his rights for others/us.

Look at verse 6. **Who, being in very nature God.** Christ always has been, is, and always will be God. The original language here says that Christ was of the very same stuff or essence as God, that he was in fact God. This truth is the foundation of our faith as Christians, as Paul tells Timothy: 'Great indeed, we confess, is the greatness of our faith, that God was manifested in the flesh.' Although Christ came and was born as a human, he continued to display the attributes and attitudes of God. Jesus lived as 100% human and 100% God - two natures in one person. He was not just a prophet, not just a teacher, not just a healer, he was God incarnate - the God-Man. John 1:14 says, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' In other words, Jesus was, God in the flesh. Incarnation means 'in-flesh'. Jesus is our Immanuel, God with us, because he was God in the form of a human being. The great promise of the Old Testament, as the Prophecy of Isaiah 40 teaches us, is that God will come in person to save and shepherd and rule over his people. Our God is not distant and remote, unable to sympathise with our problems, for because of his deep love for every one of us he shared in our nature. He fought the same temptations, the same struggles we fight, because he too was in the flesh. Yet because of his divine nature, he was able to overcome them and to live out a life that was true to his divine nature.

Admittedly, some Christians down the centuries have sought to limit the full impact of the Incarnation, either by denying the fulness of his deity or the fulness of his humanity. But Paul is quite clear here: he was truly God who became truly human without ceasing to be God. That is why in his ministry, for example, Jesus was able to extend God's forgiveness to people, even though he was accused by the religious authorities of blasphemy, for, as they argued, 'Who can forgive sin but God alone?'

Equally, we read in the Gospels that Jesus felt the same pains and sorrows of people around him, and to the same degree, because he was human. When he was told that Lazarus his friend had died, he wept, because he was deeply moved by the tragedy of it all, but later because he was God in human form he raised Lazarus back to life.

On another occasion, Jesus was asleep in a boat as the disciples sailed across the Sea of Galilee, no doubt exhausted from all the work he had done, and yet moments later when the boat and its occupants were in peril from a terrible storm, he stood up after being aroused by the disciples to wake up and commanded the winds and waves to be still. The disciples response? They were terrified, saying 'Who is this that even the elements obey him?' So, Jesus was not a mere mortal - though human he certainly was - but one who was at the same time God, able to unlock the structures of Creation and put things right.

But now, notice the next thing Paul says: '**He did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage.**' In other words, Jesus did not hold on to His rights as God. He was not looking out for Himself, but for others. He surrendered His rights as the eternal Son of God, for you and for me. He gave up His privileges in order to come as a man and suffer a death we deserved. Although Jesus had access to all the privilege and power to which his Divinity entitled Him, and although He could have exploited that privilege and power to dominate his world, Jesus considered His Deity an opportunity for service and obedience. Understanding the **Temptations** here is crucial. Instead of using all He had been given to His own advantage, He used it for others, for those who had nothing. He used it for us. All of the authority and power available to Him became a channel of giving rather than a channel for getting. His focus was not on being served but upon serving others, not upon exalting Himself, but of emptying Himself in obedience.

What a contrast this is between the value system of the world and the value system of Jesus. In our world the one who has the most money, the most power, the most prestige, is worth the most. In the economy of Jesus it is just the opposite. He who is the highest is he who does not live for himself, but for others. Jesus said 'He who would be the greatest among you is he who is your servant.' If you and I are ever going to be true disciples of Jesus we need to be servants, to give our lives in service for others. If we are going to have the same attitude as Christ, we must be prepared to loosen our grip on our rights and privileges, for the sake of others. This is what Jesus did and if we will follow Him, this is what we must do.

He became less so we can become more

Look at verse 7. **He emptied himself** - Literally poured Himself out, made Himself nothing. He emptied Himself of significance. How did He do this? By taking on the form of a servant. Christ came as a servant, even though He was and is the Lord. He gave Himself for others, even though the world should give to Him. He was God, living out a truly human life.

Jesus became a servant. He willingly left the splendour of heaven for the smell of a stable. He left the company of angels for the company of humans. He who was all-powerful took upon Himself the limitations of humankind. What a dramatic distance Jesus travelled from Heaven to the cross, from Robes to rags, from being the Great Creator to being a No-Man, someone who was regarded as worthless, from being served to serving. And why did He do it? He did it to be obedient, yes, but He did it because of love, because of love for you and for me. Again, in the words of Paul: 'You

know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty.' In other words, he became as we are that we might become as he is!

This is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. It means to lose our life to save it, it means to be emptied of self in order to be able to be filled with Him and His passion for others. Sadly, It runs contrary to our sinful nature to become less so others can become more. And yet, if we are going to be like Jesus, we must become servants, allowing others to become more at our expense.

Jesus was obedient regardless of the cost

Look at verse 8. **He humbled Himself** - It is impossible for us to grasp the depth of this statement, to understand the intensity and immensity of what God is telling us here. He who made all people and had all authority over all people, humbled Himself and allowed Himself to be put to death on a cross.

Yes, Jesus was obedient, even to death on the cross. It is on the cross that the true nature of God is revealed. God is love. He came to give Himself for us, to die for us, to die at our hands, because that's what it took to redeem us, to buy us back from the condemnation we brought upon ourselves through our sin. There is nothing He will ever ask of us that will cost us as much as going to the cross cost Him. We can never give up as much as He gave up. But we must, however, as his servants be willing to do whatever He asks, whenever He asks, wherever He asks.

For many of us, and I certainly include myself here, we have already determined in our hearts the things God wants us to do. We have set the parameters of service. We will only serve in such and such a place, in this or that way, on this or that day. We have convinced ourselves that God would never ask us to do anything outside of that box. In reality we have simply decided we are not going to listen to Him when He asks us to go outside that box. We have selective obedience, and that is not real obedience. Genuine discipleship involves being obedient to Christ, whatever the cost, whenever the call, wherever and however. There are no part time, partial disciples. With Jesus it is either all or nothing.

Jesus was rewarded with the highest honours

Look at verses 9-11. Because Jesus was obedient, because He humbled Himself, because He was willing to pay the price, He was exalted. The Father has given Him the name above all names, the name at which every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. The Principle here is this: God rewards humble, obedient service. Matthew 23:11: 'The greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.' And we, too, will be greatly rewarded if we live for Christ and follow him in obedient service. We have been given an amazing faith, for through his Spirit we have been moved to proclaim Jesus as Lord in this life, to bow our knee to him, to submit our lives to him in repentance and baptism; we have been called to be his disciples, his ambassadors to a much needy world. One day, every person will have to acknowledge 'Jesus is Lord.' But we have been able to do it in the here and now.

However, being saved is not simply an insurance policy for the life-to-come. For there is no genuine life in Christ that is not at the same time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, being transformed into the likeness of Christ. And any form of religion that puts self above others is not and cannot be true Christianity. If Christ, being God, humbled Himself to become a servant for others, then how can we as His followers, who are not God, in any way exalt ourselves? If He died for others, how can we fail to live for others? Sometimes we tend to look for that one BIG experience where we can demonstrate our faithfulness to God, demonstrate our servanthood by giving of ourselves in some heroic way. But in reality that is not usually how it happens. In reality, it happens in the small, everyday, somewhat uneventful occurrences of our lives. This attitude of serving others instead of being served is lived out in the many interpersonal exchanges we encounter every day. How we treat the checkout person at the supermarket, how we talk to the man collecting our rubbish. It is, most often, not seen in how we treat those who are socially above us, but how we treat those who are socially beneath us.

So, as we meditate and reflect on the Christ of Christmas and prepare for the New Year and everything that it may throw at us, may we be willing as his servants to fashion our lives according to the pattern he has set us, willing to listen to his call, to act on his promptings through his Spirit, and to share with others, in words and deeds, the Good News of a Saviour's incredible love. May this be our New Year's resolution in spite of Covid-19 and the many barriers it throws in our way to meet and converse with others. Amen.

We bring our service to a close with a final well known hymn, "Love divine, all loves excelling." We've already had a solo, now we're going to have a duet at Bethesda, a Father and Daughter duet, from Tim and Esther, who sing the first verse unaccompanied but have pitched it rather high, so Joy comes to the piano and accompanies them for the remainder of the hymn, in a lower key. If you are at home, you can sing it as high or low as you wish!

Tim and Esther sing to the tune Blaenwern

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us your humble dwelling,
all your faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, you are all compassion,
pure, unbounded love impart;
visit us with your salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all your grace receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more your temples leave.
We would always give you blessing,
serve you as your hosts above,
pray, and praise you without ceasing,
glory in your perfect love.

Finish then your new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see your great salvation,
perfect in eternity:
Changed from glory into glory
till in heaven we take our place,
there to sing salvation's story
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley
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Finally Colin leads us 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 forevermore, Amen.

