

Christmas Day, 2021

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church Welcome & Prayer (Steve G)

Good morning and welcome to our Christmas Day service at Charlestown Presbyterian. For the Christian, Christmas Day is typically a day for celebration so it is good perhaps to stop and pause and remember this even though it has been a difficult year and month. Some might even be asking what it is that we are celebrating? Well of course there is the birth of Jesus who would go on to be the Saviour for our sins. In Matthew 2 we read about the visit of the Magi to the newly born baby Jesus, "When they saw the star, they were overjoyed and on coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped Him. It is our hope and prayer that this joy also fills your heart on Christmas Day.

Let's begin our service by turning to the Lord God in prayer...

Dear Lord, we thank you that in the midst of all the things that are going on right now, we have finally made it to Christmas and have the chance to remember your Son Jesus birth. What a present you have given to us in Jesus. Life, love, hope, joy all wrapped in the body of a little child. Help us to experience all these things again today. Help us to see this Christmas with wonder and awe. Help us to hear the stories of the shepherds and wise men afresh. And help us sing together "Joy to the world, the Lord has come." And we ask this in your Savior name, Amen.

Song – Joy to the World

[Joy To The World \(Christmas Lyric Video\)](#) [Emu Music.mp4 - Google Drive](#)

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| <p>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.</p> | <p>3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.</p> |
| <p>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.</p> | <p>4. 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.</p> |

Bible Reading – Luke 2:1-20 (NIV)

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while^{1a} Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ 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. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ 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.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the

Lord. ¹² *This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”*

¹⁵ *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.”* ¹⁶ *So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.* ¹⁷ *When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,* ¹⁸ *and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.* ¹⁹ *But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.* ²⁰ *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

Announcements

Welcome we are so glad that you were able to join us today. It has been a very difficult year for most of us and the prospects for 2022 have recently become somewhat bleaker. But today we remember that Emmanuel, God is with us. That Jesus knows what it is like to enter a world like ours. That God has a plan and a purpose for His world and nothing, nothing can stop it. Our prayer is that in the midst of everything that is going on you might receive a true Christmas presence. And that will fill your life with joy, hope and peace.

School Holidays. Our school children are on holidays this week so that means the normal activities of the church will close down for the Summer School Holidays and will only start back after Australia Day 2022. There will be a basic Kids Church that will run each Sunday over that time. Over the summer we do hope that you are able to have a break from all your Church activities. Please come each Sunday but during the week we hope you take a well earned break from everything else. Many thanks to those who have given of themselves this year to make the ministries of the church run so well.

Pandemic Prayers. As a gift for every regular attender of the church, we have published a book called **Prayers from our People during the Pandemic.** This is a collection of prayers that we sent around during 2020-21 as apart of our paper and interactive services. Please find the copy with your name on it and use it as an encouragement to pray. Merry Christmas!

Kids Talk. *It begins in Bethlehem – Children’s Nativity*

Rhyme [It Begins in Bethlehem - Children's Nativity Rhyme - YouTube](#)

Pastoral Prayer (Jo Barlow)

Our loving Heavenly Father, we have so much to thank You for. We particularly want to thank You today for the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, born into our world as a baby. We are so used to hearing the Christmas story that we may be in danger of losing the wonder of Jesus leaving His rightful place in heaven at Your side. He stooped to become one of us – a frail, mortal being, subject to hunger, pain, exhaustion and rejection, just as we are. Thank You that He was willing to be born as a baby, to entrust Himself to earthly and flawed human parents, to grow up as part of a family and most likely learn a trade. He did all of this as the means to an end – yes, to teach us how to live to please You, but more importantly, so that He could die as a substitute in our place, because He was like us in every way, other than being without sin. Father, thank You that Jesus truly gets what it’s like to be us.

Lord, though 2021 has been a difficult year in many ways, we know You are sovereign over every event and nothing takes You by surprise. Though our holiday plans and travel may have been restricted, it has helped us to appreciate the beauty closer to home. Thank You for the many good things You have given us this

year, including the provision of our daily needs, the love of friends and families, and above all, our fellowship with You and the assurance that You are with us every step of the way. Thank You that whatever may happen, You never leave us or forsake us. Thank You that our church family has been Your hands and feet in many ways this year in caring for Your people in practical ways.

Father, the rapid spread of the Omicron Covid variant is unsettling, and we know that some of our number here have been diagnosed with it. Please help each one to make a rapid recovery and be restored to full health. Would You protect us through both Your supernatural power and through ordinary means such as vaccinations and mask wearing, and we ask that people would be careful and wise in the way they spend the Christmas and New Year period.

We think of all the missionaries supported by our church – the Applebys, the Webbs, the Parsons, and Josh Montzka. Lord, we know that those who are overseas may keenly feel the distance from loved ones at Christmas time, and particularly this year as some travel restrictions are still in place. Thank You that there are electronic means for communication and we pray that they might function effectively and allow a sense of connectedness.

Lord, we know that there are those in our number, and many in our city and land, who are struggling with loss, loneliness, depression or a broken heart. We lift them up to You as the One who heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds. Please help them to turn their eyes on the Lord Jesus rather than their difficulties and see the different perspective that He gives.

We pray for Jon, Ang and the boys on holiday in Tasmania and ask for a restful break for them and a time of refreshment. Thank You for the family time they can have with Ang's family. We also pray for the Taylor family, and pray that even though Stephen will be taking all the services over Christmas and the New Year, there will be balancing times of rest and family time. We ask that You would help each of us to step into the breach where others are absent through holiday plans or Covid exposure, so that we may continue to staff our services. But we also pray for a time of rest and refreshment for every leader and church member, in order to be able to serve You effectively in 2022.

Lord, many of us will be spending time with loved ones this Christmas, many of whom don't know the Lord Jesus as Saviour and Lord – please give us opportunities to tell others about Him in a way that's clear and compelling while still being loving and respectful. For those who are facing Christmas alone, please be their portion; but help those of us who have the chance to include them. Finally, Father, we ask that each individual and family here or listening online would have the opportunity to reflect on Christmas in a way that puts Jesus at its centre, rather than the presents, and food, and even the great family times. Thank You that He truly is the reason for this season. It's in His Name, the name above every name, that we pray. Amen.

Song – O Holy Night

[O Holy Night \(Hear the Gospel Story\) \[Acoustic Sessions\] - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1. O Holy Night!
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!</p> | <p>2. Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming
Here come the wise men from Orient land
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger
In all our trials born to be our friend</p> |
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Fall on your knees
 Oh hear the angel voices
 Oh night divine
 Oh night when Christ was born
 Oh night divine
 Oh night divine

3. Truly He taught us to love one another
 His law is love and His gospel is peace
 Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother
 And in His name all oppression shall cease
 Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
 Let all within us praise His holy name

Bible Reading – Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Sermon: The best Christmas travelling stories (Stephen T)

This Christmas we probably all have a desire to spread our wings. We have been couped up by COVID for far too long. While the restrictions have eased, while the borders are still open, we want to travel. Travel to see family for Christmas Day. Travel and take a holiday over January. We don’t want to be stuck in our homes any longer, we don’t want to just be slaves to our jobs, we want to travel.

Now in the past I have done a fair bit of travelling for Christmas. I once visited my sister on the ski fields of Colorado for Christmas. I swapped a hot stinking summers day for -40 degrees Fahrenheit, even skiing on Christmas morning. And then swapped a meal of chicken, ham, seafood and pavlova for a Mexican Christmas treat put on by my sister’s friends later on in the day. That was a journey that greatly exceeded my expectations.

But there have been other journeys not so successful. Being the minister for 20 years at Tweed Heads if Kaylene and I wanted to visit family for Christmas Day it meant doing the Church services in the morning and then spending between 5 or 10 hours on the road in order to reach the family’s celebrations. One not so memorable Christmas trip meant chicken sandwiches and a coke at the side of the road on the way to Armidale but as we crossed the mountains Kaylene who often got car sick felt incredibly nauseous. We arrived just in time for Christmas tea but she instead went to bed for one not so silent night.

I am sure you all have had your own share of Christmas travelling stories. Trains, cars, planes, maybe even on a new skateboard or bike. But in the Bible, we see four of the best, the very best road trips & Christmas

day journeys you can possibly imagine. And it reminds us that each of us are on a journey today and the direction we are going will determine the destination that we will end up at. So, let's firstly look at

Slide 2

1. **Mary & Joseph journey to Bethlehem. (Luke 2:1-7)**

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... 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."

This road trip was forced upon Mary & Joseph. Caesar the most powerful man in the known world wanted to make sure every person was accounted for, so that all those eligible to pay taxes would have no where to hide when the tax bill came their way. So Joseph & his heavily pregnant wife had to make the trip of around 145 kms from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

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Now if you go on Google maps today it tells you that you can make that journey via car in about 1 hour and 58 minutes. So not a great inconvenience. Except there were no cars in that day nor highways. And although many of the TV shows depict Joseph leading Mary on a donkey on the way to Bethlehem, these were dirt poor peasants. So, it is most likely they would have walked.

So, I am guessing that is at least a 50 hour walk, maybe more, seeing Mary is about to give birth. But they had no choice. They were forced to take this Christmas journey. And when they do get there, there are no beds left. And so, they end up with the animals in the stable. Now I am pretty positive that none of us have ever had a Christmas journey as bad as that.

Slide 4

But at the end of that nightmare scenario, Mary delivers Joseph the first ever Christmas present. Their first child. A son named Jesus. A present that was given not just to Joseph but according the angels was *"one that will cause great joy for all the people"*, even to us today. What an epic journey but almost immediately there is another amazing trip to be taken.

Slide 5

2. **The shepherds to the stable. (Luke 2:8-20)**

⁸ 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... 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... 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."

Slide 6

Now the shepherds didn't have to travel very far to get to the stable. Bethlehem was full of flocks of sheep and they were in one of the fields nearby. And they weren't forced to make the journey, they were invited to by the angels. What a privilege! Their Messiah, their king, had just been born and the first invites were not the bold and the beautiful but the normally forgotten shepherds, who normally missed out on all the big occasions.

But they accepted the invitation to this journey of discovery & they were not disappointed. They praised and glorified God. They told everyone about what had happened. They had been given the chance to see God in the flesh. Now that's one for the travel blog, isn't it? But the next travel story will raise the stakes even higher. For in Matthew's gospel, we read

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3. The wise men follow the star. (Matthew 2:1-12)

Whereas most of us today let our GPS or phones tell us where to go, the wise men saw in the stars of the birth of a special king. So they set off on a long, long journey, a dangerous journey, following a star that was pointing them in the direction they were to go. And it would have taken them around 7 weeks to get from the East to Jerusalem. How interesting though that wise men from Iran and Iraq see the signs before the wise men of Jerusalem?

So, they make their way through deserts, along tracks where there are raiders and bandits in order to come and worship this king. And give him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But notice that they don't want to come empty handed before the king of the Jews! And the danger continues even when they get to Jerusalem because they have to deal with Herod's deception. Who doesn't want to worship this new king but instead to murder him. And the wise men don't have a star to guide them on the way home so God sends them a dream and tells not to go via the palace but to go home via another route.

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4. Jesus travels to earth

Now they are three amazing journeys. All at Christmas time. A decreed journey, a journey of discovery as well as a dangerous journey. But they all pale into insignificance with the greatest journey of all. The journey of Jesus. He didn't walk down the path from the Bethlehem hills or even cross the deserts from a far land, he came from heaven to earth. He left eternity to be bound by time. He laid aside his majesty of ruling the world to spend 9 months inside Mary's womb, to force his way down the birth canal and to end up covered with blood and muck and being placed in an animal's feed trough. Not a trip that I would choose to take this Christmas! But one that Jesus choose to travel for you.

You Bethlehem was just his first stop on this momentous journey. A journey that would take him to Egypt as a refugee, back to Nazareth as a fugitive, grow up as a tradie, lose his father at a young age, become an itinerant preacher and end up being crucified on a Roman cross. But then going to hell for three days, back to earth for another 40 days before rising to heaven and he is now sitting (again) at the right hand side of the father in heaven, ruling the earth. How amazing is that?

Jesus was willing to travel that journey for you. To humble himself for you. To die for you. To be raised to life for you. Jesus came to earth for you and me. And has promised that when he leaves this earth he will prepare a place for you. Which means the journey he is encouraging us to take today is not just to your family's place for chicken and cake. Not just to the coast to chill and relax. Jesus wants us to come to Him this morning.

Slide 9

In a few moments we will sing the Christmas Carol "O Come all ye faithful" but let me remind you of the words. *"Oh, come, all ye faithful, Joyful & triumphant! Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him, Born the King of angels; Oh, come, let us adore him; Oh, come, let us adore him; Oh, come, let us adore him; Christ the Lord."*

Come to Jesus. Take the trip to Bethlehem. Not in a plane, not on a camel, you don't even have to walk. You can do that by bowing your head. You can do that by worshipping the Christ. You can do that by offering a gift that is more valuable than gold, frankincense and myrrh, by offering yourself.

Slide 10

Getting into the car and coming to Church is not enough. Spending time with your family and even God's family is not the journey that Jesus wants you to make. Instead, he wants you to join him in Bethlehem and worship him. And then follow him on his journey to Jerusalem and onto the cross of Calvary. Come to Christ. Come to the cross. Deny yourself and take up his cross and follow Him.

That is the ultimate Christmas journey. Yes, is a dangerous one, for we don't really know what it will involve. Yes, it is a journey of discovery as we learn more about ourselves and the one who made us as we are. Yes, it is a journey of death, where we die to self and live for Christ. But it is a journey of decision that each of us need to make today. Friends come.

Come and adore him. Come and worship him. Come and believe in Him. Come and accept the salvation that Jesus came in the world to give you as his Christmas gift. A gift with no strings attached. A gift of grace. A gift that will last for all eternity. A gift that keeps giving.

Slide 11

In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet - will be home for Christmas." Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper & showed him the message. He glanced at it & said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas."

Notice what the editor had done? He emphasised the journey and missed the good news that man had flown for the very first time! We'll let us not make the same mistake today. Thinking about the journeys we want to make or are about to make and not see the implications of the journey that Jesus has already made. From heaven to Swansea/ Charlestown via the manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary.

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That's the first leg of the journey. The second leg is that he wants to pick you and I up and take us to heaven for all eternity. So let me close with this Facebook post from English pastor Sam Allberry, who puts it this way; "O come all ye faith/less, joy/less and defeated. O come ye, O come Ye, to Bethlehem. Because (he concludes) Christmas is for the weary, the messed up, the broken. If your life isn't Instagrammable, Christmas is for you." So come to Jesus!

Song – O Come all ye Faithful

[O Come All Ye Faithful \(Christmas Lyric Video\)](#) — [Emu Music.mp4 - Google Drive](#)

1. Oh, come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant! Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him, Born the King of angels;	2. Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation; Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above! Glory to God, Glory in the highest;
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[Chorus]

Oh, come, let us adore him; Oh, come, let us adore him; Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.	3. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, Born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n. Son of the Father, Now in flesh appearing;
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Closing. We wish you a Merry Christmas

We wish you a Merry Christmas
We wish you a Merry Christmas
We wish you a Merry Christmas
And happy new year
God tidings we bring
To you and your kin
We wish you a Merry Christmas
And happy new year