

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR 2023: 25th December 2022 – 7th January 2023

Greetings from Eileen

Dear Friends,

Joy to the World!
Happy Christmas, and may you be filled afresh with the Lord's Peace and Love
as we journey into 2023.

I hope you have had an occasion to sing carols as we approach Christmas. Some carols are faithful accounts of the events of Jesus' birth while others are poetic reflections of what Christmas means or feels like. Among the familiar carols is 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' *how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.* Like that town then as it is today – like the world then and today, it wasn't still and dreams interrupted sleep even in the Christmas story. But what is true is that everywhere there are dark streets into which God's birth as a human child is an everlasting light, where hopes and fears of all the years are met in our Lord at Christmas.

My Christmas day always involved listening to our late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the radio, and in recent years watching her on the television. This year will begin a different experience as we hope to hear and watch King Charles III giving us his thoughts on Christmas day. I have a few copies of a small book comprising our late Majesty's devotions that I shall offer to our congregations at services on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning. I have appended a Christmas message from The Archbishop of York, who also refers to Her late Majesty.

A census of people identifying themselves with the Church of England, as Christians, or of no faith, has been reported as confirming the impending demise of the Church. But it statistically omits to identify how Churches or Church-led initiatives in public places are the light in the lives of a growing many hungry for food, homes, care, company, and hope in this world and the next. It omits to ask the question, "*what if the Church (in whatever form it takes in every community) is no longer present?*" The media and their analysts have not considered the evolving way in which the Church is articulating itself and in which people are engaging with Christians who follow Jesus. How shall we step from the joy of Christmas into the new year? Same old, same old, or with renewed faith to be a blessing even as we are continually blessed?

Whatever joy looks like for you and those you love, I wish that for you; and may God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be a part of your joy.

Christmas Eve 24th December**4pm St Mary's, Gainford – Crib Service****7pm St Andrew's, Winston – Carols by Candlelight****11.30pm St Mary's, Gainford – 1st Communion of Christmas Night (Midnight Service)****CHRISTMAS DAY 25th December****9.30am St Andrew's, Winston – Christmas Day Communion****10.45am St Mary's, Gainford – Christmas Day Communion****NEW YEAR'S DAY 1st January 2023**

There will be no services at our churches, which will be open. Communion is available in St Mary's, Barnard Castle

May the light of faith illumine our hearts through him who is Christ the Lord.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

NOTICES:

Winston's residents' Advent Calendar around the village is now complete! You can **listen to Bible readings and Reflections** from the children of Staindrop CofE Primary School and from Simon Edens, our Ordinand in Training from Cranmer Hall placed in our parishes:
<http://www.gainfordwinston.church/advent>

There's a QR code at each of our Advent Calendar locations so that everyone walking the trail can scan it to access Carols and seasonal music as well the readings and reflections.

❖ **DONATIONS FOR THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE:** here is a link for donations:
<https://welcomechurches.org/giftofawelcome>

PLEASE PRAY FOR LOVED ONES OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED:

- ✦ Claire Mead, her mother and family on the passing of Claire Mead's Grandmother - Elizabeth Gilmore
- ✦ Keith and Judith Pressley and their family on the passing of Keith's mother – Ada Pressley

And pray for all for whom Christmas is a difficult time as they miss loved ones departed .

Collect for Christmas Night (24th- 25th December)

Eternal God,
 who made this most holy night
 to shine with the brightness of your one true light:
 bring us, who have known the revelation of that light on earth,
 to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever. Amen

Collect for Christmas Day (25th December)

Almighty God,
 you have given us your only-begotten Son
 to take our nature upon him
 and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
 grant that we, who have been born again
 and made your children by adoption and grace,
 may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever. Amen

Post Communion Prayer on Christmas Night

God our Father,
 in this night you have made known to us again
 the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
 confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him
 until the day dawns
 and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.
 To him be glory both now and for ever.
 Amen

Post Communion Prayer on Christmas Day

God our Father,
 whose Word has come among us
 in the Holy Child of Bethlehem:
 may the light of faith illumine our hearts
 and shine in our words and deeds;
 through him who is Christ the Lord.
 Amen

ADVANCE NOTICE:

The Epiphany Choral Evensong is at 5pm on Sunday 8th January 2023 Gainford St Mary

First Reading (Christmas Night): Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains

are the feet of the messenger who announces
peace,

who brings good news,

who announces salvation,

who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;

for in plain sight they see

the return of the Lord to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;

for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

King James Version:

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet
of him that bringeth good tidings,

that publisheth peace;

that bringeth good tidings of good,

that publisheth salvation;

that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

⁸ Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice;
with the voice together shall they sing: f
or they shall see eye to eye,
when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

⁹ Break forth into joy, sing together,
ye waste places of Jerusalem:
for the Lord hath comforted his people,
he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The Lord hath made bare his holy arm
in the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth
shall see the salvation of our God.

Gospel Reading (Christmas Night): John 1:1-14

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

First Reading (Christmas Day): Isaiah 9:2-**7**

² The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
 those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
 on them light has shined.

³ You have multiplied the nation,
 you have increased its joy;
 they rejoice before you
 as with joy at the harvest,
 as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴ For the yoke of their burden,
 and the bar across their shoulders,
 the rod of their oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors
 and all the garments rolled in blood
 shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For a child has been born for us,
 a son given to us;
 authority rests upon his shoulders;
 and he is named
 Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ His authority shall grow continually,
 and there shall be endless peace
 for the throne of David and his
 kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
 with justice and with righteousness
 from this time onwards and for
 evermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do
 this.

Gospel Reading (Christmas Day): Luke 2:1-14

¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before 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; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
 and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

A Christmas Message from The Archbishop of York, Christmas 2022: 'The transforming power of love was the Queen's theme'

How will you celebrate Christmas? What are your family traditions?

Gathering around the telly at 3pm is one of ours.

However, for a few fleeting moments next Sunday Christmas may feel a little unfamiliar. For the first time since most of us can remember, we'll turn on the TV for the big Christmas Day speech and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II won't be with us. Someone else will be speaking.

Her son.

Watching his speech will become the new Christmas Day tradition. And in that moment, many of us may well say a quick heartfelt prayer of thanks for her late Majesty's incredible life and example. But then we'll get on with our celebrations - and enjoy hearing what our new King has to say.

In my home city of York, a magnificent statue has been erected in tribute to her late Majesty. I was privileged to stand with King Charles as he unveiled the monument outside York Minster on a rainy afternoon last month. He spoke tenderly about his beloved mother and the gift and legacy she leaves behind.

"She was always vigilant for the welfare of her people," the King told the crowd; "a constant example of the duty and care for others, and for our community, which is the calling and the duty we all share."

I then offered a prayer of blessing over the statue - grateful for the copious amounts of 'holy water' being supplied by the heavens as I spoke. Though I'm not sure the crowd were as grateful, mind you!

I've been reflecting on the King's words.

Our Queen was a leader who always dreamed big for the potential of our nation and the Commonwealth she served. And being a woman of such strong Christian faith, it was a Jesus-shaped dream, one built on his foundations of loving service, faithfulness, and compassion. It's why the common theme running through so many of her Christmas Day speeches was the transforming power of love.

Her great muse was of course the Nativity story itself: the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. It's a story as old as the hills and as fresh as the first flower of spring. It still has the power to move and inspire in a way that few other stories can. This is because it is rooted in some of the harshest realities of real life, a world away from the cosy images that are sometimes presented to us at Christmas.

It's a story about a teenage pregnancy and a poll tax summons. A frightened young couple with nowhere to go. For anyone living in hard circumstances this Christmas, it is a relatable and deeply human story. And we need to hear it now more than ever because we too live in the dark and difficult times of economic hardship and fuel poverty and of a cruel and evil war being waged against Ukraine.

There is no quick fix or easy solutions to any of this, though there is more we should be doing to help the poorest in our society and those who are misplaced because of war, conflict, and oppression.

Yet I remain full of hope.

Like her late Majesty the Queen, I have faith that goodness and light will always overcome the darkness and of the power of love.

I too find great strength and inspiration in the Christmas story. The character I find I'm always drawn to is St Joseph. He can easily get forgotten. But I am inspired by his faithfulness. I can identify with him. Once Mary said her 'yes' to God, she at least had the very clear evidence of the baby growing inside her. But all Joseph had to go on was a dream. A dream that told him to trust God and not to fear. And, remarkably, that's what he did. I also reckon that Joseph's response is much closer to how it is for most of us when it comes to faith. We don't have the physical evidence Mary had; but we do have dreams and visions. We have the stories that other people tell us, and we have to decide whether we're going to trust them.

Joseph trusted. Against the odds. He supported Mary. He gave Jesus a home.

Putting my trust in Jesus, inviting him into my life, has changed and transformed me. It has also compelled me to try and change the world for the better.

At Christmas we are all invited to be part of this story and part of this change. It is the time when we are asked to reflect on what we're putting our faith in and what dreams we have for our lives and for the world. Or to put it very plainly: are we going to make room for Jesus by making room for those who are in great need? Are we going to be led by love?

And of course, another great Christmas tradition is to come to Church to a Carol service, or a Christingle or for Communion at Midnight or on Christmas morning. This is where we can hear again the joy and challenge of the Christmas story – the story of God with us. You may even discover a Jesus-shaped dream of your own.

God bless you and happy Christmas!