

# Salford Methodist Circuit



**Christmas Eve - 24th December 2020**

**Rev Kim Ratcliffe**

Good evening, and welcome to this Christmas Eve service in the Salford Methodist Circuit, it's good to have you here with us this evening. Let's begin with some scripture:

**Bible Reading: Luke 1 : 26-31**

*"God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her: "Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you." She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus."*

**Bible Reading: Psalm 19: 14**

*Let my words and my thoughts  
be pleasing to you, Lord,  
because you are my mighty rock  
and my protector*

Thanks be to God for that word.

'C' - the first letter of Christmas Eve. What does Christmas Eve mean for you? This is the first Christmas Eve, in a long, long time, that I have been at home. Normally myself and a good number of people from our churches in Salford at 7 o'clock would meet at the entrance of Salford Royal Hospital and be guided around some of the wards to sing carols to those who weren't going to be home on Christmas Day, including the staff. We are often given requests. I would then return home, have a nice brew and set out again for the Midnight Service at St Paul's in Monton. Getting home about 12.45 when, with the adrenaline still going from all these carols, I would settle with a hot drink and make sure everything was in place for the Christmas Morning services.

This year is of course different but we still have a need to focus as much as we can on our Spiritual needs. One of the things that help us to do that is when we sing carols. The first letter of Christmas Eve is 'C' for Carol.

**Hymn: In the bleak midwinter**

*In the bleak midwinter  
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 midwinter,*

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*long ago.*

*Heaven cannot hold him,  
nor the earth sustain;  
heav'n and earth shall flee away  
when he comes to reign.  
In the bleak midwinter  
a stable-place sufficed  
God, the Lord Almighty,  
Jesus Christ.*

*Angels and archangels  
may have gathered there,  
cherubim and seraphim throngèd the air -  
but his mother only,  
in her maiden bliss,  
worshipped the Belovèd  
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.*

## **Prayer**

This Christmas Eve let us come to You Lord with our hearts filled with what they are filled with. The small things, that may not seem much but are precious to us. The larger things that we find overwhelming and may want to hand them over to you now.

## **[Silence]**

We thank you that even although our Christmas may be or seem very different this year we still have room for you and always will have as we remember tonight the small baby born in a stable in Bethlehem who came into this world to bring, hope, peace, joy and love to everyone.

## **[Silence]**

We thank you for the moments that we have been able to bring others to you. And we think about those who that we have been able to bring hope to in just a small way, or peace to if only just in a small way; perhaps even joy to if only in

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a small way, and love in ways that people would recognise it was your love being given to them through us.

In Jesu's name, **Amen.**

'H' is for our next letter of Christmas Eve. Our youngest son and his girlfriend left their home here with us at the manse to live in their new home. One thing that everyone said to them was 'we hope that all goes well with the move' despite us being in the middle of a pandemic. 'H' in Christmas Eve is for hope. Hope is something that everyone has held onto in the months gone by and hope is what we need to continue to hold onto tonight. Tonight, we have a positive expectation as we look forward to celebrate the Christ Child born in Bethlehem once more. We also have the hope of the hope of Jesus returning to us whenever that may be.

## **Bible Reading: Mark 13 : 24 - 25**

*"Following those hard times,  
Sun will fade out,  
moon cloud over,  
Stars fall out of the sky,  
cosmic powers tremble.  
And then they'll see the Son of Man enter in grand style,  
his Arrival filling the sky—no one will miss it!"*

'R' is a reminder of the richness and vibrance of God's creation; and that was actually placed on our doorstep on Saturday evening, it came in the form of a beautiful unexpected Poinsettia plant (I hope I've said that right!) There had been a knock on my door and when I opened it there it was no-one at the door, but there on the doorstep was that beautiful plant and the vibrance of the richness and the greenness of that plant we brought into our home. I also brought the love of a neighbour into our home that evening too, because we found this out a little later it was our neighbour, who very kindly placed these items for us.

'R' means we have a need to respond to that 'knock on the door', if we don't open our door to Jesus to let Him in then how can we take God's love to others as we step out of our homes. Revelation 3 verse 20 "Listen! I am standing and knocking at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in." We have received and we need to respond, not keeping the door of our faith closed to others.

'I' There is a saying in team work, you may have heard it, "there is no 'I' in team" meaning that we are a part of a team and there is no room for selfishness. But...

In the build up to Christmas and even on Christmas Eve we often forget about ourselves. We try to make everything right for everyone else. It is a part of our giving and our generous nature. The 'I' in Christmas Eve gives you permission to

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stop, yes find time if you can for family and friends but put the 'I' back into Christmas Eve. It isn't being selfish, it is looking after yourself. Ask for the Holy Spirit to help you to do this.

'S' On a clear night we can look up into the sky and see so many stars shining brightly. 'S' is for star. We remember on this night that a long, long, time ago the brightest of all stars shone in the sky. A star that shone so bright it helped the shepherds and the Magi to find who they were looking for. The long-expected saviour of the world who would be born. A new King being born into the world, a King that would change that world.

'T,' 'T' is for trust. We need, perhaps more than ever, to trust that God has this Christmas in the palm of His hand Just as he had the tiny baby Jesus, just as he has always had us and our families in the palm of his hand. We can trust that God sent His Son Jesus into the world be with us always. Some of the words from St Patrick's Breastplate tells us that as we arise each day:

Christ is with us

Christ is before us

Christ is behind us

Christ is in us

Christ is beneath us

Christ is above us

Christ is on our right

Christ is on our left

Christ is with us as we

Lie down

As we sit down

As we arise

He is in the heart of everyone who thinks of us

He is in the mouth of everyone who speaks of us

He is in the eyes of everyone who looks at us

He is in the ears of everyone who hears us.

**'C H R I S T'**

**Christ with us**

## **Hymn: 'Born in the night'**

*In the bleak midwinter  
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 midwinter,  
long ago.*

*Heaven cannot hold him,  
nor the earth sustain;*

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*heav'n and earth shall flee away  
when he comes to reign.  
In the bleak midwinter  
a stable-place sufficed  
God, the Lord Almighty,  
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*Angels and archangels  
may have gathered there,  
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but his mother only,  
in her maiden bliss,  
worshipped the Belovèd  
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.*

'Christmas Eve' - we've looked at 'CHRIST' and now we are looking at 'MAS', the final little bit of 'Christmas'

'M', the letter M. Our Ruth mentioned the other night, that's my niece, as she placed each of the decorations on the Christmas tree, each bauble and decoration held memories for her and 'M' is for memories. When Aleck and I came to put our Christmas Tree up I was thinking the same. I have some Christmas baubles, Christmas decorations made by my sister Pauline, some from Aleck's sister Julie, a little Robin that reminds me of our Mark - he loves robins - and some new ones made professionally by Naomi. God is in these decorations, the memories that sort of tingle within us. But something that was missing, and has been for a good number of years are the playdough decorations that the boys brought home from school many years ago but the memories of even them, as I was putting the decorations up on the tree this year, even these wee playdough decoration memories, you know, came to mind.

This year, though, many people will struggle with the memories of loved ones no longer with them, our thoughts and our prayers are with them tonight and will remain with them. Many people have memories of being in jobs that they loved but are no longer in, homes they have had to give up. We all have memories of our past Christmases where we were able to go about freely. This year we will still make memories, perhaps very different from memories made before and

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tonight we hold each other and others within God's love and God's care. Let's, for a moment, just simply 'be'

## Silence

**The second letter of 'MAS' is 'A' and 'A' is for Angel.** How can we have Christmas Eve without the mention of angels?. God's messengers who, like us, praise and worship God, they showed their protection and gave direction to people on God's behalf. They delivered messages, to Zechariah - we see that in Luke chapter 1 verse 13 to 19 - they gave messages about the impending birth to Zechariah and Elizabeth that a son would be born to them, the son would be John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus. We can see that story in Luke chapter 1 verse 26 to 28, and of course we know the angel Gabriel visited Mary with news that she would be having a child, the Son of God, and then visited Joseph, in a dream in Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 to 25 to give him the news that Mary was pregnant and he knew that, even although what the angel had told him would be true, life for them both, Mary and Joseph, would now be very different, not exactly as he had planned things for them to be but God's plan for us isn't always how we see them. There have been a few people I have known who believed that they had been in the presence of an angel and have also felt the presence of Jesus standing right next to them. Those moments haven't been frightening and have been comforting to them.

'S' When have there been moments this year, including these past few weeks of Advent and even on this day Christmas Eve, that you have been able to see God? I'd like to invite you to write in your mind or on a piece of paper those moments, the names of the people, the places and the situations. And 'S' is for silence. We will do this in the silence and peacefulness of this moment.

[Silence]

## Hymn: Away in a manger

*Away in a manger, no crib for His bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head,  
The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

*The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes,  
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,  
And stay by my side, until morning is nigh.*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay,  
Close by me forever and love me I pray,  
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,  
And fit us for heaven to live with Thee there.*

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## Prayers of Intercession.

On this eve of Christmas, we bring our prayers to you., Lord  
Unlooked for, Christ comes.

To the shepherds,  
Watching their sheep through the long, dark night,  
He comes with the glory of the angels' song  
And in the humility of the manger.

*[Silence]*

Loving God, we pray for our communities  
In the midst of our everyday lives, and those moments  
we haven't expected. Surprise us with glimpses of  
the glorious, humble love at the heart of existence.

Lord, come to your people.

**In your mercy set us free.**

Searched for,  
Christ comes.

To the wise and powerful,  
star-led to Bethlehem, seeking a king,  
He comes, child of Mary,  
crowned in meekness,  
worthy of every gift

*[Silence]*

Loving God, we pray for the leaders of the world  
please guide them with your light to the true wisdom  
of justice and peace, let them be humble and not  
aggressive as they work for fairness and freedom  
with respect for human life, remembering that each  
life is valuable.

Lord, come to your people.

**In your mercy set us free.**

Longed for,  
Christ comes  
To Anna and Simeon,  
to all people whose days are lived in a faithful expectation,  
he comes, a new life to the old,  
a living prophesy of hope.

*[Silence]*

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Loving God, we pray for the Church in all the world  
Unite us by your Spirit, and make us faithful witnesses to  
The hope we have in you.

Lord, come to your people.  
**In your mercy set us free.**

Prayed for,  
Christ comes.

To all of human kind.  
Men, women, girls and boys,  
Crying out in the darkness and wilderness of this world  
Crying out in the pain and the loneliness of their lives,  
Jesus comes, baptized, as one with us,  
Our Saviour, healer and our friend.

*[Silence]*

Loving God, we pray for those whose lives are hard and  
Painful or whose existence is sorrowful, bitter or empty:

*[Silence]*

In their need Lord, may they know your healing touch,  
Reaching out to comfort them, strengthen them and restore them.

Lord, come to your people.  
**In your mercy set us free.**

God, you come to us now as you have to people of every age.  
We thank you for all who have reflected the light of Christ to us  
And to others. Help us to follow their example  
And bring us with them to eternal life;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **Hymn: Silent Night**

*Silent night, holy night:  
sleeps the world; hid from sight,  
Mary and Joseph in stable bare  
watch o'er the child beloved and fair  
sleeping in heavenly rest.*

*Silent night, holy night:  
shepherds first saw the light,*



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*heard resounding clear and long,  
far and near, the angel-song:  
'Christ the Redeemer is here!'*

*Silent night, holy night:  
Son of God, O how bright  
love is smiling from your face!  
Strikes for us now the hour of grace,  
Jesus, Lord at your birth.*

We thank you God for this blessing of knowing you are indeed here with us.  
Amen.

As we ponder on this evening's service and our prayers, let us just reflect for a moment as we come to the end of our service.

In The Bleak Midwinter - Christina Georgina Rossetti  
Music: Gustav Holst

Born In The Night - Geoffrey Ainger  
Words and Music: © 1964, Stainer & Bell Ltd, 23 Gruneisen Road, London N3 1DZ ([www.stainer.co.uk](http://www.stainer.co.uk))

Away In A Manger - Anonymous

Silent Night - Joseph Mohr  
translated by Stopford Augustus Brooke

Like A Candle Flame - Graham Kendrick  
Words and Music: © 1998, Graham Kendrick / Make Way Music Ltd, PO Box 320, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. TN2 9DE UK. [www.grahamkendrick.co.uk](http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk)

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