



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 24 December 2020



## Christmas Eve

### Introduction

Dear all,

A very warm welcome our Sunday Reflections on Christmas Eve, may I take the opportunity to wish you all a very blessed and peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year. May 2021 bring hope and joy.

Could I ask you, that you share these reflections with anyone who might like to read them, either through the post or by leaving a print through the letterbox, if you can do so safely. Thank you

### Intimation

There will be no Sunday Reflection on 27 December as I am on annual leave

Please join me now in our weekly prayer and reflection

The Bible says:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. (Is 7)

### **A Christmas Prayer**

## By Robert Louis Stevenson

Loving God,

The day of joy returns and crowns another year with peace and good will.  
Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus that we may share in the song of  
the angels, the gladness of the shepherds and the worship of the wise men.  
Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love all over the world and  
Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.  
Deliver us from evil by the blessing that Christ brings and teach us to be merry  
with clean hearts.  
May the Christmas morning make us happy to be your children  
And the Christmas evening bring us to our bed with grateful thoughts, forgiving  
and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. AMEN

Lord's Prayer

Our father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come  
Thy will be done on earth,  
As it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread  
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors  
and lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil  
for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

### ***READING 1: Isaiah 9, 2;6-7***

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.<sup>7</sup> Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

### **REFLECTION 1**

We have always had a Christingle service and tonight is no exception. We may not be able to give out Christingles to everyone this year for health and safety reasons, we may have to be sensible and responsible not to spread the virus and as a church we are the first to encourage you to reduce your contact, to love your neighbour and your family by keeping your distance, and to protect them, even if that hurts. As a church we are the first to encourage you to go to our services safely and to use our increased online offers, but that does not mean that we will not have a Christingle service as we always had, and if you have not already done so, I'd like to invite you to make and to light your Christingle at home. You will find instructions on our website. This year our Christingle, even if it is just the one I have here – and maybe a few in the congregation - will be a sign that a virus cannot defeat us, can not defeat the hope of Christmas. Nevertheless, there is no denying that Christmas, that our service is different. Anyone can see that and therefore I thought we will do our Christingle service differently, as well. Normally we build a Christingle together in our service this year I thought we might try to see what happens when we dismantle it together, to have a look of what makes up a Christingle and what happens if one piece is missing,

**The Candle:** The first element of the Christingle is the candle, symbol of the light of the world and as Christians of course we believe that this is Jesus. So, what would happen without light in the world, what would happen if we walked in

darkness as the prophet Isaiah says about his people in today's reading? I recently stumbled across the promotion of a new series with my favourite Scottish actor Robert Carlyle, it is called COBRA. In this series the nation is plunged into cold and darkness through some sort of electromagnetic storm that affects all power stations. The consequences in this film are bitter, the country is in chaos, factories can't manufacture, hospitals can't operate, the streets are full of rioters and the Prime Minister of the future is about to lose his job. Without light the country is about to implode. For the prophet Isaiah and his people, the darkness is one of war, exile and loss and today we might feel that we are living in dark times, as well when we are painfully aware how different Christmas is, how much light and sparkle has been taken away from us. When some of us don't bother to light the Christmas tree, because for one person, for a small circle it may just not be worth the effort. And that is understandable, we at St James, however, have taken a different route – and there is no right or wrong about that. We have got candles on a wreath, we have put up a Christmas tree – and the Kirk Session insisted it had to be the big one, even though we had to close our doors, even though it was only visible online for half the advent time, because we wanted to show that the light of Christmas still shines in the darkness, that God's love still shines in the darkness.

**The sweets:** So, what happens, if we take away the sweets of the Christingle, superficially that might stand for taking away the nice things of the season, for me that is the stroll about the Christmas market, having a glass of Glühwein with friends, maybe picking up a last-minute stocking filler for someone, for you it might be the crowds when the Christmas lights are turned on or the Christmas crackers around a large family table. Of course, we have to find different ways this year, it hardly needs saying, but I think that we can, and for our mental wellbeing I think it is important that we do, that we meet over zoom, that we phone our elderly parents and grandparents, that we still decorate our house and have a nice meal. And maybe we can even see opportunities, deeper conversations in a smaller circle for instance or enjoying the fact that the run up to Christmas is not quite so intense this year. But taking away the sweets goes deeper than that, the sweets stand for the gospel spread into all directions and so the danger is that we lose our direction, lose our way in the darkness that we become like the people the prophet speaks of people living in the land of deep

darkness, without seeing the dawn that the prophet promises. We cannot let that happen. We do not need to let that happen. Because it is hope and trust in the child that is born on Christmas day that can give us direction and that cannot be taken away from us.

**The ribbon:** stands for the blood of the saviour, stands for the child that is born, the wonderful councillor, the prince of peace. It encircles the orange that stands for our world. So, what would happen if we took away the ribbon? We would lose the centre of the Christingle and the centre of our faith, the faith that gives us the strength to live through dark and difficult times. We would take away not only the centre of Christmas the child we set our hope on, we would take away the point of Christianity itself, that Christ saved us through his blood.

**The orange:** What remains is a perfectly normal orange. It continues to function, as the world, for which it stands would continue to function, but it misses out on what makes it special, set aside for a very specific purpose, it misses out on Christmas and most importantly it misses out on what Christmas means for us and so I would like to invite you if you have not done so already to assemble or reassemble a Christingle, the light for love and hope, the sweets for direction and the nice things of Christmas, for joy, the ribbon for our faith. AMEN

## **READING 2: Luke 2, 1-17**

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 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 Saviour 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.

## **REFLECTION 2**

It is a tradition in my family that my mum sends me a rather different advent calendar, it does not contain chocolates or treats or even pictures, instead it is packed full with stories, poems and prayers. It is also a tradition here in St James that I share a story with you each year. Seeing that our first reflection has turned out to be rather long it is a short one, this time. It takes place a long time ago when I was a teenager and my country that had been divided into East and West not only by a border but by a deep divide in what people believed to be right became reunited

Here goes:

We could hear each other before we could see. The well-known melodies of our Christmas carol sounded clearly through the chilly air of this winter morning. The path was overgrown. The now dried-up grass had grown knee deep between the cobbled stones. For nearly thirty years it had been closed off. Even the barrier that had divided the old village road that separated the place into “here” and “there” had become rusty. For as long as I could remember it marked the end of my world. After the wall had fallen in faraway Berlin it took quite a while until the new freedom reached the little Wietlingbek on the border between Schleswig Holstein and Mecklenburg in the far north. But on New Year’s Day 1989/1990 the old barrier was really and officially opened. And so, we made our way there, people from both sides of the border. We sang Christmas carols against the darkness of the night and the sinister view of the old border controls. We walked towards each other as we sang. No-man’s land became everyone’s land. And when we met beneath the open barrier, I understood what it meant: “on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”

## **Prayer of Intercession**

Loving God,

We pray to you, our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. We thank you that you are there for us in the darkest of times, that you promise us the dawn after a long night and in gratitude we pray for all whose life is dark, who cannot see the light of hope.

We pray for the world: for the leaders of the nations and their governments; for countries where conflict and war hold people in their cruel grip, for areas most besieged by the pandemic; for broken places where healthcare and resources are scarce, and the pandemic brings further suffering

Lord, you are on our side, help us in times of trouble

We pray for all key workers: for all medical staff and hospital workers, who go to work knowing the risks they face; for medical researchers, seeking ways to prevent and to cure; for social workers, protecting the vulnerable, for farmers,

delivery and shop workers, keeping the nation provisioned; for cleaners, fighting the spread of infection

Lord, you are on our side, help us in times of trouble

We pray for the young and those in education: for those anxious about examinations, a place at university, or employment; for those worried about loved ones and friends; for those concerned about their own health

Lord, you are on our side, help us in times of trouble

We pray for our congregation and community: for the elderly, confined to their homes and separated from family and support; for children, removed from their friend; for those who have lost their source of income; for those who fear for their home; for those who have no home; for those offering extraordinary, everyday kindness

Lord, you are on our side: help us in times of trouble.

## **Benediction**

And the God who came to us at Christmas guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. AMEN