

Church at Home

Advent 4

Sunday 20th December 2020

We're almost there on our Advent journey. A focus for this Sunday could be **faith** – following on from hope, peace, and joy. Our faith has been passed down through the generations and we have the stories



of the Bible that trace the threads of God's sure and steadfast promise of salvation. One particular thread is that of the role of Bethlehem in that story – David's home and the place where the Messiah would be born. Once again, we are all travelling to Bethlehem in our imaginations, with the Holy Family, with the Shepherds and with the Magi. In this season it is the focus of our faith journey as we draw near to the Light of the World - the dayspring from on high - who comes to light up our darkness and lead us home to heaven.

Here are 9 short readings that each take us to Bethlehem:

Genesis 35:19-20 Rachel's pillar – a place of mourning

1 Samuel 16: 4-5 King David's town – a place of royalty

Ruth 1: 22 The House of Bread – a place of plenty

Micah: 2-5 The Promised Ruler – a place of prophecy

Luke 2: 1-7 Joseph's birthplace – a place of census crowds

Luke 2: 8-15 Local Shepherds – a place of angels and wonder

Matthew 2: 1-2, 9-12 Where the star led – a place of worship

John 7: 41-43 He is from Bethlehem – a place of hope

Galatians 4: 4-5 At the right time – a place of promise

Suggested hymns:

[O little town of Bethlehem](#)

[Once in royal David's city](#)

[The Calypso Carol](#)

[O come all ye faithful](#)

Take a moment to bring the past week before God, remembering the good things that God has done for you, and also acknowledging those words, thoughts and deeds that have let God and yourself down. Use the **Collect for Advent** as a prayer of recommitment to the way of Jesus and a reminder of the hope to which we are called:

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

Some initial thoughts on the readings:

Bethlehem means 'House of bread'. It was just a little town; Micah's prophecy points that out quite clearly. To this little town, a hungry Moabitess named Ruth came seeking bread. She was poor, she was a Gentile, she was a widow. But in the little town of Bethlehem, she found much more than she had dreamed. To this little town, a prophet named Samuel came, searching for a king for Israel. God rejected the obvious candidates and chose young David, whom everyone else had overlooked. To this little town, Joseph and Mary came, seeking lodging. The inn was full and so Mary brought forth her first-born son in a manger. He was the Bread of Life for whom Ruth searched; the King of kings for whom Samuel searched; the haven of rest for whom Joseph and Mary searched. It was just an insignificant little town, despised by many, overlooked by others. But just like Jesus, its most famous 'son', what is rejected becomes the focus for the most important moment in the history of the universe – the incarnation; God with us and for us for ever.

Read through **the story about Bethlehem from Luke 2** in your Bible at home or find it [here](#)

[Here](#) is today's Gospel story from Luke 1 (The Annunciation) with wooden figures and wondering questions for the whole family

This is **our all-age Advent song**: [Lord Jesus, come](#)

Visual for a focus table: either find Bethlehem in an atlas at home or print off an online map of where it is in the Palestinian Territories. What else can you find out about Bethlehem today?

Reflection: two versions of Bethlehem



From a BBC online page dated December 2019

A manger scene by British artist Banksy has appeared at a hotel in Bethlehem in the West Bank. Dubbed the 'Scar of Bethlehem', the work shows Jesus's manger by Israel's separation barrier, which appears to have been pierced by a blast, creating the shape of a star. On Instagram, the artist said the work was a 'modified Nativity'. Israel says the barrier is needed to prevent terror attacks. Palestinians say it is a device to grab land.

[Search here](#) for other pieces of artwork that Banksy has created linked to Bethlehem

It seems the Bethlehem of today and the Bethlehem at the time of the nativity have a lot in common.

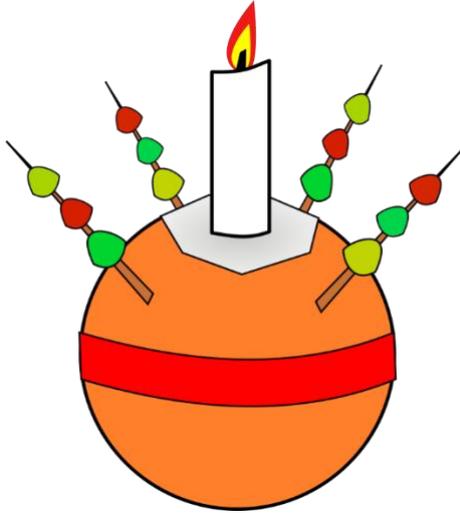
In contrast and for further reflection, read the story of the carol 'O little town of Bethlehem' [here](#) – an online piece written in 2006



For the whole family

Christingle at Home: ideas, stories, prayers, readings and activities that you can explore together with a link to the work of **The Children's Society**

[Here](#)



Do you know what each part of the Christingle symbolises?

Here's a family favourite to sing together now that 'Bethlehem's in sight'

[Little Donkey](#)

For our prayers, let us remember:

- Christmas services in person or online where the Bethlehem story will be told and may perhaps be heard for the first time
- Hospital staff treating patients suffering from COVID 19; relatives waiting anxiously to visit; and those waiting for other operations
- The Christmas easing of restrictions- that it won't be abused and lead to a worsening of the crisis after the festival season
- Those in Care Homes this Christmas and those who visit
- Today's news headlines and any particular situations and people in other countries that God has placed on your heart
- Those known to us who are ill, in hospital, awaiting treatment, anxious or who have been bereaved

Add any other particular people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord's Prayer**.

End the time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond

Church Leaders Contact: - **Roger** - 01992 815 838. **Martyn** – 01992 814121

