

DECEMBER 25, 2016

CHRISTMAS DAY

ELDER
RENATE WEBER

Children were assisted by Monika Herrmann

Musician: Monika Strasser

Text: Luke:1:21-32, Luke 2:1-20

Hymns and songs:

Ihr Kinderlein kommet - 4 verses

#71 *Mit Jubelklang stimmt an das Lied* - 1, 2, 3 and 6

#29 *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* - 2 verses

#13 *Away in a manger* - all 3 verses

#110 *The First Noel* - all 6 verses

We three kings - all 3 verses (on copied sheet)

#38 *Hark the herald angels sing* - all 3 verses

#30 *Fröhliche Weihnacht überall* - all 3 verses

The Choir:

Candlelight Silent Night

Auf, auf doch ihr Kinder

Children from the congregation process in at the start of the service.

Ihr Kinderlein kommet, o kommet doch all

Good morning and welcome! It is lovely to see you all taking the time to celebrate Christmas Day as a community. Yesterday morning at the Bayswater service we celebrated Christmas Eve. *Heiliger*

Abend (holy night) is one of the many German traditions we have kept as Templers. I hope you were all able to celebrate this special evening among family and friends.

Does the Christmas story still matter? What does Christmas mean to you? Is it a special time when you get together with special friends and the wider family? Do you still bake the Christmas cookies your mother and grandmother used to bake or have you given up? How many of you still use candles on your real Christmas tree? (It was wonderful to see at least ten people put up their hands.) How does the *Christkind* manage to sneak in and put all the gifts under the tree, or does Father Christmas visit your home with the gifts? Does the room with the tree become out of bounds, like it used to in my childhood? In those days there was still a keyhole to peek through to see if gifts had arrived and the Christmas tree was not dressed until the morning of the 24th. I love the carol singing and our mum always said we had to 'earn' our gifts by singing at least one Christmas carol. I watch our older members sing all the verses off by heart, of just about any song chosen. I also love the smell of Christmas, the scent of fresh pine needles, the aroma of cinnamon and spices, the smell of candles when you blow them out.

The original story of Jesus' birth has not really changed over the years. Much of the story fulfils what was prophesied in the Old Testament. (This

could be a service in itself.) Angels, Bethlehem, a baby from the line of Abraham being born to a virgin, transport via a donkey, a Messiah being born, all are foretold.

Let us sing *Mit Jubelklang stimmt an das Lied*. It is number 71 in the red hymnbook. This song was written by Christian Rohrer and later translated into English by Edith Rohrer.

The Christmas story has endured for more than 2000 years. The birth of a child laid in a manger, the angels and the shepherds, is a story of hope and survival. How would you feel today, when heavily pregnant, to be told you needed to travel by donkey to register for a census, give birth in a stable and then later to flee to Egypt with the baby because King Herod sought to kill your son? It could be the plot for a film!

The story expresses hope, peace and goodwill. Think about the messages on the Christmas cards you may have received. There is also that lovely story of the Christmas truce where there was a ceasefire on the Western Front on Christmas Eve in 1914 and troops on all sides sang *Silent Night*. Sadly they started shooting again the next dawn! Christmas is also about family – sometimes stressful and at other times joyful. Some people travel halfway around the world to be together at Christmas.

Joseph and Mary were an unusual couple for their time. They were not married when Mary conceived; Joseph, however, still married her. Their child was born in humble surroundings, but was honoured by kings and wise men, as well as shepherds. The little family became refugees shortly after Jesus' birth and did not return until after Herod's death.

The Christmas story also tells of family and humility. It was foretold by prophets and has substantial manuscript support. But there is another reason for

considering the story of Jesus' birth, perhaps the most important. The Christmas story is also a story of love on many levels.

God so loved the world he gave his only son...

Jesus' twin commandments, which we still follow today, are both based on love – love God with all your heart and mind and your neighbour as yourself.

I will ask the choir to come up now and sing. We will sing two Christmas songs.

Auf, auf doch ihr Kinder – a little song which encourages children to follow the star to Bethlehem and bow before our Saviour, praise him and strive to be like Him – and *Candlelight Silent Night*.

Thank you ladies for taking the time to come today and provide such beautiful music.

Now the children are going to help tell a story called *The Christmas Gift* by Mark Young, and you are going to help us by singing the appropriate carols to accompany the story. So could our children please come up? Sophie, Bridget and Josh.

The Christmas Gift by Mark Young

Summary

A simple telling of the Christmas story, using pieces from a nativity scene.

Characters

Narrator - Renate

First Child - Sophie

Second Child - Bridget

Third Child – Josh

Script

The story begins with the CHILDREN seated

around a chair occupied by the NARRATOR, who is the grandmother. The NARRATOR is holding a box which is open at the top. The contents of the box are presents for the CHILDREN. The contents of the presents are the pieces of a Nativity Scene. The stable is not wrapped in the box and should be taken out by the NARRATOR before the gifts are given to the children.

The setting should resemble a living room of the home of the NARRATOR. It should contain a decorated Christmas tree with a Bible and a few presents under it, a chair, a small table and perhaps an oval woven rug for the children to sit on.

NARRATOR

It is a tradition in our family that one special gift may be opened on the night before Christmas. And in this box I have gifts for each of you.

(The CHILDREN react with quiet excitement of receiving the gifts.) But, first let me take out this odd little shed. (NARRATOR takes out the shed and sets it on a small table.) What does this little building look like to you?

FIRST CHILD

It looks like a stable.

SECOND CHILD

What is it for?

THIRD CHILD

It is a place for cows and sheep to eat and sleep.

NARRATOR

This is a very special stable and I will tell you why, but we must open the first gift. (NARRATOR gives the first gift to the FIRST CHILD to open. The gift should contain the figures of Mary and Joseph.)

SECOND CHILD

What is it?

FIRST CHILD

It is a figure of a woman and a man. They look very happy. (Places them in the stable.)

THIRD CHILD

Who are they?

NARRATOR

Let me tell you a little about these two people. Their story comes from the Bible. (NARRATOR reads Luke 1:21-32.)

The Virgin Mary

²⁶⁻²⁷ During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin girl who lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel came to her and said, "Greetings! The Lord is with you; you are very special to him."

²⁹ But Mary was very confused about what the angel said. She wondered, "What does this mean?"

³⁰ The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, because God is very pleased with you. ³¹ Listen! You will become pregnant and have a baby boy. You will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great. People will call him the Son of the Most High God, and the Lord God will make him king like his ancestor David."

We will sing *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen*, Behold a rose is growing number 29 in the red hymnbook – please feel free to sing in German or English.

SECOND CHILD

Is it my turn to open a present... please?

NARRATOR

I was just about to ask if you would like to open one. (NARRATOR hands the SECOND CHILD a gift containing figures of cows, sheep and perhaps a

donkey.)

THIRD CHILD

What is it?

SECOND CHILD

Figures of cows, sheep and a donkey. This must be their home. (Places them around the stable.)

FIRST CHILD

Does the stable have a manger? What does the Bible say about these animals and their manger? Was this their home?

NARRATOR

Let me see what it says. (NARRATOR reads from Luke 2:1-7.)

The Birth of Jesus Christ

¹ It was about that same time that Augustus Caesar sent out an order to all people in the countries that were under Roman rule. The order said that everyone's name must be put on a list. ² This was the first counting of all the people while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ Everyone travelled to their own hometowns to have their name put on the list.

⁴ So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea. It was known as the town of David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David. ⁵ Joseph registered with Mary because she was engaged to marry him. (She was now pregnant.) ⁶ While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby. ⁷ She gave birth to her first son. She wrapped him up well and laid him in a box where cattle are fed. She put him there because the guest room was full.

Number 13 in the red hymnbook – *Away in a manger*

NARRATOR speaks to CHILD THREE

NARRATOR

Now it is your turn to open a present. (NARRATOR gives the THIRD CHILD a present containing figures of shepherds.)

THIRD CHILD

There are figures of shepherds. (Places them around the stable.)

SECOND CHILD

Do the sheep belong to the shepherds?

NARRATOR

Let's continue reading and see what the scriptures say about shepherds. (NARRATOR reads from Luke 2:8-20.)

Some Shepherds Hear About Jesus

⁸ That night, some shepherds were out in the fields near Bethlehem watching their sheep. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord was shining around them. The shepherds were very afraid. ¹⁰ The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid. I have some very good news for you – news that will make everyone happy. ¹¹ Today your Saviour was born in David's town. He is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a feeding box."

¹³ Then a huge army of angels from heaven joined the first angel, and they were all praising God, saying, ¹⁴ "Praise God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please him."

¹⁵ The angels left the shepherds and went back to heaven. The shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this great event the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they went running and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the feeding box. ¹⁷ When they saw the baby, they told

what the angels said about this child. ¹⁸ Everyone was surprised when they heard what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ Mary continued to think about these things, trying to understand them. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God and thanking him for everything they had seen and heard. It was just as the angel had told them.

We will now sing *The First Noel* number 110 in the red hymnbook

NARRATOR

Well, I have more gifts to open. What shall we do with them?

FIRST CHILD

It is better to give than receive.

SECOND CHILD

And all of us have received.

THIRD CHILD

Let's find someone who hasn't received anything yet.

NARRATOR

Good idea. Go and find someone out there. (Indicates in the direction of the congregation.) And give this gift to someone who looks very wise. (NARRATOR hands the present containing the figures of the three wise men to the FIRST CHILD. The CHILDREN pick out someone from the congregation and give them the gift. The person who is selected must be brought to the small table and open their gift. After the gift is open the THIRD CHILD says.)

THIRD CHILD

What is it?

THE WISE LOOKING PERSON

Wise men.

SECOND CHILD

(To WISE LOOKING PERSON) Place them on the nativity table.

(The children may help the WISE LOOKING PERSON arrange the wise men on the table.)

We Three Kings on the copied sheet

NARRATOR

I still have one more gift to open.

FIRST CHILD

We'll take care of it.

(The CHILDREN go out into the congregation, find a young child and bring them to the front.)

NARRATOR

Here is the last gift for you to open. (NARRATOR hands the child a gift containing the baby and the manger. After she opens it, SECOND CHILD says.)

SECOND CHILD

What is it?

FIRST CHILD

It is the best gift of all. It is a manger with the baby Jesus laying in it. (FIRST CHILD takes the girl with the gift to the table and places it in the centre of the stable.)

THIRD CHILD

Does this gift belong to all of us?

NARRATOR

His name is Jesus which means "God Saves" because he will save his people from their sins. They will call him Emmanuel which is Hebrew for "God is with us". And, yes, this gift belongs to all of us.

We will sing *Hark the herald angels* sing number 38 in the red hymnbook

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Thank you to all our children who helped us tell the Christmas story.

Christmas is also a time for reflection and remembering. Like many of us, all my various decorations, collected over the years, are carefully wrapped each January and put away in their boxes. There are baubles from Oma Frank, the red wool Hampelmänner from Oma Herta's time, our first decorations as a married couple in 1964, the two tiny König Nussknacker we brought back from Rothenburg for the boys in 1982, the angels Kirrily made with safety pins and beads. Each decoration has its own story and memory and we listen to the *Small One* narrated by Bing Crosby and *The Happy Prince* – “Little sparrow, Little Sparrow will you stay with me one more day?” while all these treasures are unwrapped and a selection is made of what our new tiny little blue spruce can handle. There are always tears, even after forty years of hearing the same stories.

Please stand if you are able as we take this opportunity to remember with love and gratitude all the Christmases past, all those who are no longer with us.

Let us also celebrate the new life, the next generations who will carry on in their own way and forge new traditions.

We send out best wishes to those who are suffering, sick or injured. We also send messages of hope, peace and love to those who face an uncertain future. To those families in Germany, Syria and all around the world who have recently

and tragically lost their loved ones, may the world unite in peace on this special one day and may that peace and hope spread into the New Year. Amen

Let us conclude with hymn number 30 *Fröhliche Weihnacht überall*

Thank you all again for coming, to the Monikas, the children who helped with the story, the Choir, and all the helpers.

Frohe Weihnachten and a Happy New Year to you all.