



Sunday 6th December 2020

**Welcome to our Sunday Service**  
**Emmanuel - God with us!**  
**Prepared by Kathryn**

Silent night holy night, All is calm all is bright  
Round yon virgin, Mother and child  
Holy infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night holy night, Shepherds quake at the sight  
Glories stream from heaven afar  
Heavenly host sing hallelujah  
Christ the Saviour is born, Christ the Saviour is born

I love You Lord I worship You  
Hope which was lost now stands renewed  
I give my life to honour this  
The love of Christ the Saviour King

Silent night holy night, Son of God love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus Lord at Thy birth, Jesus Lord at Thy birth

Hello and welcome to Croftlands Community Church. Thank you for joining us today. It's early December and each year around this time, I like to begin my personal advent journey with some time out in the forest, enjoying some of the Christmas foliage.



**Happy  
Birthday  
to Freddy**  
(10th Dec)



**Steve G (7th Dec)**  
**Elizabeth G (11th Dec)**  
**May God Bless You All**



Heavenly Father,

As we approach Christmas in such different times, help us to be touched by the Joy of the Good News given by the angels. We think of all those, for whom Christmas will be a sad, lonely time and ask that your joy would touch lives in unexpected ways bringing hope and peace.

We bring our worship and praise to you, the maker of the world, yet made a child in order to birth your kingdom among us. We pray, 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.

May our lives submit to the glorious rule of Your Kingdom in all that we think, say and do.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Every year the Christmas season consumes our energy, our time, our finances, as the lights twinkle and the tinsel glitters, and yet the essence of Christmas can so easily escape us. If we were to peel away the layers of Christmas celebrations, how would we actually describe the essence of Christmas? There would be many answers no doubt if we were to ask a cross section of people ...

- ◆ A time for families and friends to get together
- ◆ the giving and receiving of gifts,
- ◆ a time of warm festivity in the cold and dismal mid-winter,
- ◆ a celebration of love... All really lovely reasons to celebrate,
- ◆ Others would have no hesitation in acknowledging that it's a Christian celebration to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

As I spent time recently trying to define the essence, the kernel, the gold nugget at the heart of Christmas in it's simplest and yet most profound form, I believe it's this ...  
Emmanuel—God with US!



As we get caught up in the frenzy of Christmas busyness, we know that somewhere in it all is a great mystery, a great wonder, something so remarkable, that if we could just capture it and seize hold of it, it would fill us with joy and breath-taking amazement as we marvel in admiration at something so beautiful. God with us -

### **The Maker made a child**

Reading: [Luke 2: 1-14](#)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while<sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> 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.



<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”** <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”



<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”

<sup>15</sup> 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.”

We read that as the shepherds were routinely out watching over the sheep, on this night, the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. This glory is the rightness, the holiness, the presence of God shining all around them, so weighty that it impacts their lives and compels them to hurry into Bethlehem in joyful expectancy, to experience for themselves everything they have just heard. This announcement to the shepherds was described by the angel as good news of great joy for all people, and the result of good news is always joy! Having experienced for themselves the baby lying in a manger, just as they had been told, they returned to their everyday lives, but everything had changed. Their situation was the same, yet completely different as they returned glorifying and praising God at everything they had encountered, and spreading this amazing news where ever they went!



**When was the last time you experienced real joy?** That might sound like an insensitive question as we approach Christmas 2020. It’s been a difficult year full of anxiety, stress, discouragement, loss, and joy has been in short supply.

Maybe from where you are right now, you feel that joy is something you are unlikely to experience ever again. For some of us, the pandemic has compounded the already difficult situations in our lives, and just when we needed family and friends to be around us, we've had to bear the burdens alone. Maybe there's a difficult person/situation that has caused you great pain, and brought previously unthinkable scenarios into your life that you never, ever expected to have to deal with and life has been tough. You're trying to find a way forward in a landscape that looks so different.

**What are our expectations for Christmas this year?** There's been much talk of individuals and families planning to write off Christmas this year or cancel Christmas 2020 because the expectation is that even with the slight easing of lockdown for five days, Christmas will be a dis-appointment. Many of the usual gatherings/celebrations/festivities will be curtailed, and for some people, their own personal circumstances have changed beyond recognition since last Christmas and perhaps there is an expectation of sadness, loss, loneliness, and joy is the least expected experience of Christmas.

Let's look briefly at how expectation vs expectancy can dramatically affect our joy.

Expectation is something that we pre decide/pre-define and then experience disappointment when that expectation is failed or what we expected does not happen in the way we had expected. Failed expectations lead us to a place where we no longer expect anything and so life has no joy in it. We look at circumstances and pre-decide that there is no hope.



With expectation, I get to decide that this and only this is what I want, and I pre-decide what God can or can't do. I pre-decide the outcome of the difficult times, because I'm not overly convinced that God really loves me. I believe that if God doesn't give me what I really want, or if he doesn't fix the situation with the solution I want, then life will be a huge disappointment.

Expectancy, however is a joyful anticipation that doesn't pre-define and so there is an excitement about how things will play out. Expectancy is full of questions, unsure of how the answers will come, but knowing for sure that they will come in the best way.

Expectancy says, 'God the choice is yours and I believe it's a good one. I know you love me and that you'll take care of me'.

Living with expectation says, 'I don't know what I'm going to do—I'm so depressed. The future looks bleak and so the future is bleak'.

Living in joyful expectancy says, 'I can't wait to see what God is going to do in my situation. What will he do in my family, with my job situation, or where he will lead me'

There's another word for joy-filled expectancy - it's faith!

Psalm 5: 3 **In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you and watch expectantly.**

Christmas is a time of expectancy - children 'get this' better than anyone else... how many days left until Christmas? Will the sock at the end of my bed be filled with presents? What's in the present under the tree?



**We see it in the Christmas story ....**

The people of Israel were looking in expectancy for their Messiah, Mary wondered in expectancy at the message from the angel, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem in expectancy of all they had just witnessed from the vision and message of angels in the sky - where will we find him, what are we caught up in here? The wise men were expectantly following a star - what is this star? Where is it leading?

We read of 2 people who had been living and praying with a heightened sense of expectancy for years! Simeon and Anna in the temple had been waiting with their hearts set in faith, and as a result, they recognised the Messiah disguised as a month-old baby boy.



Sometimes as we get older, our joy-filled expectancy can wear thin and get lost along the way, and instead of living with hope and joy, we settle for fear and doubt, but not Simeon and Anna. They had not pre-decided anything or tried to work out how it would happen and so they were open to recognise and receive the Messiah

A lot of people missed the very first Christmas because they were living with pre-decided expectations. They had pre-defined what the Messiah would be like and what he would do. They didn't expect him to come in such an obscure way that was so ordinary!

The wonder of Emmanuel, God with us, is that he hasn't come to just visit, but to move into our world, our daily lives. John 1:14 in The Message says ....

**The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.  
We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory,  
like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.**

Emmanuel, God with us is when God's future for planet earth arrived in the present. His Kingdom broke into our world and the sovereign rule of God is breaking into the present. Jesus taught us to pray, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven' .

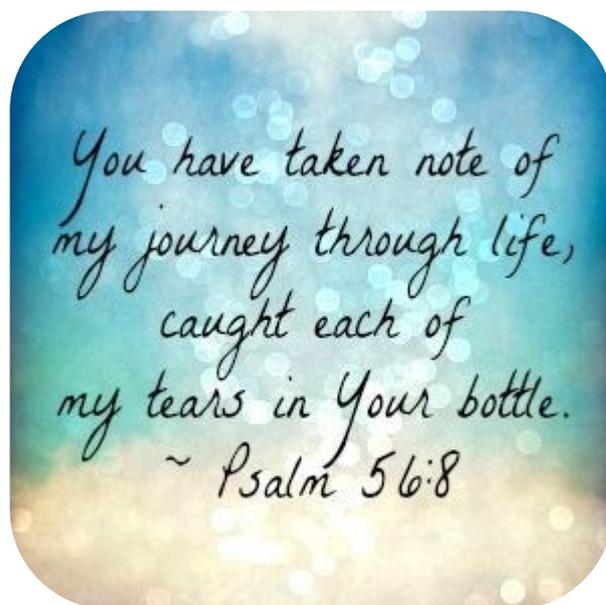
It was always God's intention to rescue his beautiful and powerful creation from the corruption and chaos, and to bring it back into order and fruitfulness. Through the death and resurrection of Emmanuel, God with us and through his spirit-led work to which his followers would be called to do as agents of his Kingdom transformation, we anticipate that day with joyful expectancy as promised when 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' and 'the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he shall reign for ever and ever'.

The climatic moment of Emmanuel, God with us was on another seemingly ordinary night/early morning when once again, the heavens waited in joyful expectancy, and yet the followers of Jesus were under the crippling discouragement of failed expectations, and so on the glorious Easter morning when Jesus burst through death destroying it's power, and rose from the grave, no one anticipated or expected it. Ever since the fall, death had brought an end to life, along with the efforts, dreams and aspirations of each individual. Now the one whose name means 'God with us' has destroyed the power of death, so it no longer has the final word in our lives, and everything that we have invested in his Kingdom still stands as we build our hope and our future on the promise that we too will be raised with a new body like his and be fully part of his renewed, transformed world where evil is no more and everything is put right and restored.



I Corinthians 15:58 reassures us that nothing we do in the Lord is in vain. Nothing we go through or experience is meaningless, but is part of building for the Kingdom of God and preparing us to be more equipped and refined for our life in his Kingdom, both now and in the future.

As we engage with the essence of Christmas, God with us, as we take a metaphorical journey of expectancy to Bethlehem and encounter the baby in the manger, we too get caught up in the wonder of this good news that brings joy to all people. As we are impacted by the glory, the holiness, the presence of God shining, so weighty that everything else in our lives takes on a new perspective and gives way to this joy, so that although nothing may have changed in our circumstances, yet everything has changed and joy has come to us. Everything we do, we now reflect that glory, our circumstances, however difficult are achieving something purposeful and far reaching. Every tear drop is measured and known and as it's sown into God's economy it brings a harvest of joy. Every little thing we do, however small as a follower of Jesus is investing into a much bigger story. To quote Tom Wright, he puts it this way in his book 'Surprised by Hope' ...



*Every act of love, gratitude and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings, and for that matter one's fellow non-human creatures; and of course every prayer, all spirit-led teaching, every deed which spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption and makes the name of Jesus honoured in the world - all this will find it's way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation which God will one day make '*

Let's move into this Christmas Season and into 2021 with expectancy and anticipation of all that God will do in our lives, our circumstances, our families and our church.

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.**