

LANGBANK PARISH CHURCH
Sunday 3 January 2021
Order of Service



WELCOME

Good morning everyone and a Happy New Year to you all.

This is the last Sunday of Christmas and today we celebrate the coming of the Wise Men to the Manger.

Because of Christmas, we can go into the Year confident that God is with us, and that we have the same Star to guide us...

Let us pray

O God of the Auld Year and of the New,
source of insight into the past,
source of steadiness around the present,
source of hopefulness in the future,

we come today to praise You!

We praise you, O God

for Times and Seasons,

for Youth and Maturity

for Family, Friends and Neighbours...

And we praise you for the loved ones
 who have blessed our days,
for love shared
 by those, both near and far,
 who shape and share our lives.

And, as we thank you,
 so, we ask you,
 to touch the dried-up places of our lives...
 refresh our parched hearts
and let us blossom in Your Kindness
 in the year that lies ahead.

Lord Jesus Christ,
when we are burdened by guilt
 - laid low by apathy
 - remote from all that motivates us.....
bring us back
 and re-set our clock,
 so that we keep step with you.

Forgive us now, Lord,
 for the times this week we spoke in anger
 for the times we judged harshly
and for the times we passed by
 when we could have stopped and helped.

In your kindness
turn us round,
recalibrate our lives
so they are measured in Gentleness and Service,
and keep Your steady hand upon our shoulders,
in all the days to come.

*We pray together now in the words
you taught us, saying....*

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 this day 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, the power,
and the glory, for ever. *Amen*

And now, let us worship God in the words and music of our first hymn....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idnVSEyayP4>

Good Christians, all rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now give heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ is born today,
ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today; Christ is born today.

Good Christians, all rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now you hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this.
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this;
Christ was born for this.

Good Christians, all rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now you need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save,
calls you one and calls you all
to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save;
Christ was born to save.

READING: Matthew 2: 1-12

Visitors from the East

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

"In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they answered. "For this is what the prophet wrote:

*'Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah;
for from you will come a leader
who will guide my people Israel.'"*

So Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: "Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him."

And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. *Amen*

We knew it would be worth it the moment we saw the star,
worth the hassle - worth the effort - worth the sacrifice.
But there were times when we wondered, I can tell you!
As we laboured over those dusty barren tracks,
as we watched fearfully for bandits in the mountains,
as the sun beat down without a break,
we wondered, all too often.

We asked ourselves whether we'd got it wrong, misread the signs.
We argued over whether we'd taken the wrong turning
somewhere along the way.

We questioned the wisdom of carrying on as the days dragged by.
And when we finally got to Jerusalem
only to find his own people had no idea what was going on,
then we were really worried.

Quite astonishing – the biggest event in their history,
and they didn't even realise it was happening!
Thankfully, they looked it up, eventually,
somewhere in one of their old prophets,
and we knew where to go then.

It was all there in the writing
if only they'd taken the trouble to look –
God knows why they couldn't see it!

Anyway, we made it at last,
tired, sore and hungry,
but we made it.

And it was worth it, more than we had ever imagined,
for in that child was a different kind of king,
a different sort of kingdom.

As much our ruler as theirs,
as much our kingdom as anyone's.

So, we didn't just present our gifts to him,
we didn't just make the customary gestures....

We fell down and worshipped him.
Can you imagine that?
Grown men,
respected – wealthy - important,
kneeling before a toddler!

Yet it seemed so natural,
the most natural response we could make,
the only response that would do!

Another hymn now – the last of our Cradle Carols for this season...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDyh4M3za8w>

See! in yonder manger low
born for us on earth below
see! the tender Lamb appears
promised from eternal years.

*Hail, thou ever blessed morn
Hail redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem
'Christ is born in Bethlehem!'*

Lo! within a manger lies
he who built the starry skies
he who, throned in height sublime
sits amid the cherubim.

Sacred Infant, all Divine,
what a tender love was thine,
thus to come from highest bliss
down to such a world as this!

REFLECTION

Five weeks have passed. since we lit our Candle for Hope. And, as we lit the candle, we echoed the Prophets' Hope for Light in our Darkness. Hope for light at the end of the tunnel of an unforgettably bad year. Hope for a better 2021.

HOPE means travelling with the expectation of a good outcome. HOPE helps us hold a steady course through the Ups and Downs which we are continuing to experience in the see-saw effect of the rollout of new vaccines, followed by news of the rising number of infections.

HOPE is a noun – but it is also an active verb – and so it provided a good vehicle for the PEACE that we hoped for, as we lit our Second Candle. Peace starts with us, with our own inner peace, and our prayers for Peace soon include peace from illness, sadness and want for our Families & Friends.

At our Zoom Christmas Party we talked about our hopes for the year ahead. Hardly surprisingly, Good Health came first but in terms of World Peace, hopes included:

- an end to the Refugee Crisis,
- a bridging of the Poverty Gap,
- and progress on solutions to Climate Change

Our Third Candle was lit for LOVE, which is possibly the most hoped for thing of all. Without Love we are mere clanging cymbals, Paul wrote. He also wrote that LOVE was patient, and kind and always sought the other's good. The word he used for 'love' was more akin to 'respect'..... the kind of love that produces a Fairer World.

Our Fourth Candle was lit for JOY..... God given moments, prompted by the Holy Spirit within us, that light up our lives. What Is there *not* to hope for in that!

Our Fifth Candle was lit last week for Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus is the *basis* of our Hope, because he can show us

- the Way to Peace,
- the Way to Love
- and the Way to Joy.

He promises that if we *seek* these things, we will find them, and turn our hopes into reality.

'Living Hopefully' suggests 'Waiting for better things'.

But, 'Seeking' is another thing altogether. Seeking describes journeying, not just with Hope, but with *intention*. And we have no better example of that than The Magi – the three visitors from the East.

They travelled with one purpose.... to find the child that was to be born King of the Jews and pay homage to him. They came with gifts of Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh, precious substances, eerily appropriate for the babe in the Manager.

They followed the star for thousands of miles, through different Time and Climate and Language Zones. They headed for Herod's Palace in Jerusalem, reasoning it to be the likely birthplace of a Jewish King. They became suspicious of Herod's ignorance in the matter, so quietly extricated themselves from his presence. Then they searched on – until, navigating by the Star, and studying the ancient prophecies of that land, they found what they were

looking for. Their journey was long, and hard, full of surprises and frustrations. Yet they kept seeking and finally met the King.

Two new words have raised my spirits this week.....

As Guest Editor of Radio 4's Today Programme on Hogmany, Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin talked about the need for the world to have more 'A-booom-ba'. This is a S. African word, impossible to translatabe into English, as we apparently just don't have the concept here....

Let's put it this way:

The European Enlightenment gave us,

"I think, therefore I am".

But the African Enlightenment can give us,

"I AM – because you ARE!" [the 'you' is plural]

'A-booom-ba' describes, not the sovereignty of the individual, but the interdependence of all of us. In *one* word, It describes ever-growing circles of Community..... Family, Village, Country, World.

Who is my neighbour?, asked the lawyer... and Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan! *Everyone is my neighbour – especially those in need.]*

The second word is 'Hygge' [*pronounced 'hue-gue'*]. This one is from Denmark, but is used all over Scandinavia. It describes **'everything that makes our lives good, simple, wholesome and sustainable'**. And, while it doesn't claim extend to JOY, it does denote wellbeing, cosiness and deep contentment with the life we are living here and now.

How sad we have no equivalents for either of these wonderful concepts, despite the fact that so many of us hope and hope for *exactly* what they mean!!

New Year is a time for Resolutions – an attempt to make something of the hopes we carry in our hearts. While Hoppers wait and watch for signs, Seekers put their hand in God's and take to the road, following the example of Jesus.

Minnie Louise Haskins has this to say:

'And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

*"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."*

*So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God,
trod gladly into the night.*

*And He led me towards the hills
and the breaking of day in the lone East.'*

Of course, there won't be many long physical journeys made from Langbank this winter. And, of course, there are some whose health constrains their activities, and some who have precious little time to spare. But, for those of you who can, January and February are good months to 'Travel in the mind'.

It's a good time to catch up on things that we really don't 'get'

- to question our pre-conceptions on things that trigger us;
- to re-evaluate the best way to be a Good Neighbour, not just within Langbank, but in a complex world seeking Global Solutions.
- to learn a bit more about other countries and cultures so we can imagine how it is to stand in their shoes.

And, in these ways, may we seek Amoomba and Hygge in our lives.

We all have armchairs, TVs, Computer or Tablet, Radios, Books and a lifetime of Christian Faith at our back. So, let's leave the Manger this year, seeking ways to follow Christ in our complicated times. This Winter, may we seek to turn our Hopes into Reality, by *being* the Lifelong Learners that true Disciples have always been.

Our next hymn is....

'As with gladness, men of old did the guiding star behold.....'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sp52sx2_GYs&t=45s

[lyrics included in video]

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION & DEDICATION

Let us pray,

Lord Jesus Christ,

you have told us to seek and we shall find,
yet we know how hard that can be....

And so today, we praise you for our scientists....

those who burn the midnight oil
seeking vaccines to keep us safe
and medications to aid our healing.

We praise you for the patience and dedication
of doctors, nurses, paramedics and support staff....

who seek and find new ways to treat disease.

And we pray for teachers everywhere,

who encourage learners to seek wisdom
- and point them in the right direction.

At the beginning of a new Year,

our Intercessions are all too familiar

as we ask for...

Hope for the despairing

Food for the Hungry, and Shelter for the Homeless

Peace in the world's streets

Fairness in the distribution of wealth

and a greater commitment to combat Climate Change.

This year, may we not stop at prayer,

but actively seek to turn the world around

- starting with ourselves.

As we leave the European Union

we pray that the people of this country

will not become isolated

or isolationist in outlook....

And we pray especially for everyone involved
in the import and export of goods
from Europe just now....
that they might seek and find good solutions
for dealing with our nearest neighbours.

Now, as we turn our thoughts homewards
we pray for our Community.

We pray for our Councillor, our MP and MSP
- those who run our Community Council
and Committee members of our local Groups and Clubs.

We pray for our School, for those who teach our children
both in Langbank and in Erskine.

We thank you for the excellent leadership they give
and pray that you inspire them and keep them safe
in the year ahead.

And we thank you, Lord, for your Church in our land,
and for all who help to lead this congregation in your Way.

We ask your blessing on Stuart and George, our Elders,
and all who help to bring Christ
to the lives of others in any way.

Guard and guide us all this year
in whatever lies ahead.

Keep our eyes focused on you
and our minds and bodies working faithfully for your Kingdom
seeking new ways to serve, in changing times.

Lord, we place before you quietly now
those people and situations
who need our prayers today.

[pause]

Lord Jesus

As we bring to you our money
for the building of your kingdom
we dedicate our lives this year
to your service
and to the building of a Safer,
Healthier, more Peaceful
and more sustainable World. *Amen*

INTIMATIONS

- 1) Today we have a Welly Collection for Compassion UK.
The Boot is placed at the front door
and we take this opportunity to wish a very happy New Year
to the children we help to support,
Javier, Gemechu, and Desy.
God bless them and their families
in Ethiopia, El Salvador & Kenya.
- 2) The Face Masks, and Jewellery are once more on the Front Pews and are
available for a donation to Church Funds. This is the last time they will be out
for a while, so take the opportunity to stock up.

Now, we leave Christmas and the old year behind, and look to the future

'Lord for the years, your love has kept and guided....'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkTrFQLy6js&t=12s>

[lyrics included in video]

BENEDICTION

Lead us gently but firmly from the Manger.

**Bring us from yesterday
into today and tomorrow.**

Cheer us with courage.

Bless us with wisdom.

Cherish us with love.

And the blessing of God Almighty

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with you all

now and evermore,

Amen