

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 24 and 25 December 2025 - Christmas Eve Evening/Christmas Day

Lectinary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 52.7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1.1-4 (5-12); John 1.1-14

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Iain Osborne, Senior Chaplain and Strategy Advisor to the Acting Bishop of Ely

People sometimes say that Christmas is mainly for children. What exactly this means is not always clear. Maybe it's said by some adult who has had too many boring, grown-up presents, and is just longing for someone to give them a Scalextric or a glitter-unicorn, but they are too shy to ask.

In any case, everyone knows that Christmas is first of all about a baby... so let's spend a few minutes thinking about how Christmas might be for children, and for grown-ups. (I'm going to use some generalisations here – they might not be true of every adult or every child – but I hope they are mainly true.)

Children do have some advantages, when it comes to enjoying Christmas. They come to it, as to most of life's experiences, with a fresh and open mind. Younger children, at least, naturally start from a view that life as it happens is roughly how it was supposed to be. There is no great template to which they are trying to mould themselves. They receive life's gifts as they are delivered, which includes Christmas.

At the same time, of course, this means that bad things might feel worse for children. They do not have a track record of surviving previous disasters, so a bad thing might seem to a young person as maybe un-survivable. And children rely on other people. They can be defenceless, if those people are not kind and wise.

Grown-ups, on the other hand, are supposed to be able to look after themselves. Few of us can, really, and the burden of trying can be very heavy. Many adults do feel heavy-burdened. Long lives can mean the accumulation of many burdens. Maybe we accumulate wisdom. Most of us accumulate some scar-tissue. Some people grow deeply bored with themselves over years of life. This is true of individuals, and it's also true of families as well. Family can be really difficult to cope with, when family members have been untruthful or unkind to each other over a long period of time, and this gets worse or better through the accumulation of years. And then, we sometimes lose the people we love, and that can feel worse at this time of year. For some, Christmas is quite hard.

But all this is about us. What about the baby, the Babe of Bethlehem?

If you ask a child to draw a picture of God, you often (not always) will get a sketch of an old bloke, in a nightie, with a beard. The child has not thought that out for themselves – they’ve been taught it, because this is the divine image that is most common in western art. Think about Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling. Most of us have seen the bit where Adam and God are reaching out, nearly touching – and most of us will be able to visualise how God is portrayed there. Old bloke, nightie, beard.

We get this completely wrong. We always get it wrong when we try to figure God out – in fact, we fall into idolatry. Better to pay attention to how God reveals His self to us. And God’s own choice is to be... a baby. God did not choose, when He came to live with us, to be an old, wise, venerable person - but to be a little child.

The person God actually is... is a child - who receives life as a gift, here and now, and does not compare it to some kind of template from the past.

The person God actually is... has not accumulated scars and cynicism, has not worn out His patience, or grown bored with the years.

The person God actually is... is not defended by legions of angels or clouds of glory, but is vulnerable, like a child. When people He loves are sad, He is sad; tears come easily to God, just like laughter.

God has showed God’s self to us in Jesus, as a baby. This is what God is like.

Is that good news, or bad news?

As a world, we have had a fairly horrible year. Let’s not spoil Christmas by dwelling on it, but I am sure you know what I mean – Gaza, Ukraine, poverty, injustice, the sense of our society unravelling before our eyes. If God being a baby means God is weak, then surely this would be bad news.

But that would be to miss the point entirely. Remember our reading from the gospel, as narrated by St John, who begins from some extraordinary, audacious claims. That this baby was with God in the beginning; that all things were made through this baby; that this baby is the light that shines in the darkness, and with which the darkness can never come to terms. This baby is the essential principle of existence. He is what reality is like, in the deepest and most powerful sense. This is not an assertion about religion, but about the nature of reality.

It doesn’t always seem this way to us. We grown-ups, who carry the accumulated guilt of our own failures, and the burden of many disappointments, sometimes want to insist that this is all there is. It’s easier to say that, actually, this is the way the world is: inherently disappointing, sad, cruel. It’s a way of saying that it’s not our fault; it couldn’t have been any other way; this is how it is for everyone. Children are just full of illusions; but they will learn.

But that isn’t true. Because God does not come to us as an old man, burdened by the years. God comes as a baby, a child; as light that defeats darkness; as an endless, bubbling spring of fresh water in a thirsty desert.

Christmas is only half the story, of course. The fresh innocence of the Babe of Bethlehem is only half the story. We will come to the other half at Easter. When – spoiler alert! – Jesus

reveals God's self in a different way, as the crucified God. The willing sacrifice, who completes the victory over evil and death by offering Himself for us.

But, for now, we rejoice in God as a baby. We rejoice, because we have faith that the child's freshness, joy and vulnerable love reveal the essential nature of reality.

The world as run by old men is not working out so great. So let celebrate, this Christmas, in the glorious discovery that the world is actually run... by a little child. *Gloria in excelsis deo.*

Ways to Engage all Generations

Most churches know very well how to engage children and families at Christmas, and will have run a Christingle and set up a crib. Otherwise, to speak to a multi-generational congregation on Christmas morning, I suggest keeping it very simple: have a conversation and ask some questions. Ask them to tell you about:

- What presents they have opened so far
- Their plans for the day
- What loved ones they will see today
- Whom they won't see, and how that feels
- Are they thinking about people around the world today?

And simply remind them that Christmas is a celebration of 'God with us'. And that He will be with us today – and with others around the world, with loved ones we won't see, and even if we are bereaved and sad.

Suggested intercessions

Such a conversation with the congregation might set up some prayers. Otherwise, there are several beautiful sets in the Common Worship Times & Seasons book, simple or more formal. Here is the simplest...

Let us pray to Jesus our Saviour.

Christ, born in a stable,
give courage to all who are homeless.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, for whom the angels sang,
give the song of the kingdom to all who weep.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds,
give peace on earth to all who are oppressed.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt,
give humility and wisdom to all who govern.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly manger,
give the glory of your resurrection to all who rest in you.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

**Jesus, Saviour, child of Mary,
you know us and love us,
you share our lives
and hear our prayer.
Glory to you for ever. Amen.**

Suggested hymns/songs

Carols, of course!

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)