

**Dorset South & West. Written Service.**  
**Sunday 15th December 2024. Third Sunday in Advent.**  
**Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.**



**Call to Worship. Advent liturgy**

Presents get wrapped with tape and glue, Tidy parcels neatly wrapped,  
Names on labels with "love from",

**O hush the noise, Let's hear the angels sing.**

We've sorted gifts and who needs what, What will they like, what will be good?  
But are there more we need to include?

**O hush the noise, Let's hear the angels sing.**

What of those alone, adrift, forgotten and neglected? What of those whose life's been hard?  
What gift of help needs wrapping too?

**O hush the noise, Let's hear the angels sing.**

**STF 178**

Long ago, prophets knew  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
come to make all things new;  
bear his people's burden,  
freely love and pardon:

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he comes,*  
*when he comes,*  
*who will make him welcome?*

God in time, God in man,  
this is God's timeless plan:  
he will come, as a man,  
born himself of woman,  
God divinely human:

Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb, God is laid;  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected:

Journey ends! Where afar  
Bethlem shines, like a star,  
stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour, do not tarry!

Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!  
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
Jesus comes!  
Jesus comes!  
We will make him welcome!

**Prayers of adoration and confession**

As we come into God's presence and try to hush the noise of this busy season I invite you to say to yourself the words of this familiar worship song. Gradually saying each line quieter and quieter until the third line is a whisper.

Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God

Lord God in this still moment we want to bring you our praise and thanksgivings for all the many blessings that you have given us in this past week. This time of year can seem full of busyness. However it is a wonderful time as people of all faiths and none prepare to celebrate the season. A time when love and joy are more evident. We pray that through all the glitter and frippery that the true meaning of this season will be revealed in the hearts of all people. How love came down to us in the form of your son our saviour. The sacrifices that were made for our salvation. We cannot find words that describe the joy that our hearts are filled with because of your unending love. Accept our deepest gratitude and help us to reflect that thankfulness by our words and deeds. **Amen.**

We confess that it is all too easy to lose sight of the real meaning of this season. Forgive us for the times we have forgotten the true purpose of Christmas and help us in our advent days to prepare ourselves to truly celebrate your birth. Forgive us for the busyness that has taken priority in our preparations and robbed us from worshipping you and preparing ourselves to celebrate this most important moment in the life of our faith. Help us to be still and to truly appreciate that you are our God. **Amen**

**Bible reading. Luke 3:7-18**

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and

thrown into the fire.” “What should we do then?” the crowd asked. John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.” Even tax collectors came to be baptised. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.” The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

## Reflection

Throughout Advent and Christmas 2024 the Methodist Church is calling us all to ‘Hush the Noise.’ This is a phrase taken from the carol *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*. Are you racing through the lines in your Carol memory bank to find how ‘Hush the Noise’ fits into the carol?

Edmund Sears, who served as the pastor of the Unitarian Church in Massachusetts wrote the lyrics in 1849. The carol is usually sung to the tune “Noel” arranged by composer Arthur Sullivan. Sears was a progressive thinker for his time, condemning slavery and supporting equality between men and women. The year was a turbulent time. European Revolutions were occurring in waves, and the US was warring with Mexico. Consequently, Sears penned these lyrics in a state of melancholy. He portrays the world as dark and deaf to the message of “Peace on Earth” in Christ’s birth.

The carol describes a “weary world” filled with “Babel sounds”, “sin and strife” and war. Sadly, 175 years later the carol is just as relevant. We long for harmony, justice and restoration. How much of the news over the last year has been filled with wars and unrest that seems to have no end or resolution? It’s almost banal to place our own events that get us wound up against the bigger world view. However we know that so much can easily destroy our sense of peace and that loss of equilibrium is just as important in the context of finding peace in our world. How we long to hush the noise. Whether it is the events that are happening personally or on a global level.

It would appear that in our Bible Reading that the people who came to John the Baptist were also looking for a way to hush the noise. John’s words are at first not very pleasant or peaceful. He seems to insult them. Telling them almost to hush their noise, but in very strong terms. Why did he call them a brood of vipers? Vipers are poisonous snakes, perhaps the image of a snake brings to mind the Garden of Eden where the serpent deceived Eve and sin entered into the world. By calling them a brood of vipers, he was calling them children of the devil. Not what they assumed themselves to be, rather the righteous children of Abraham. He speaks of a wrath that is coming! Not very calming and reassuring so far. Then there’s what could be read as a threat. That if they don’t reform, well, the outlook is grim to say the least.

“What then should we do?” That question is asked of John three times. The crowds ask it. The tax collectors ask it. The soldiers ask it. It’s a question many of us are asking these days. How many of you have asked that question as you look at the world today? My guess is that most of us have. How many of you have had circumstances in your personal life or relationships that left you asking that question? I suspect we all have. Here’s why I say that. Most of the time we know what to do. Every day we make hundreds of decisions, big ones, little ones, important ones, unimportant ones, life changing ones, some with lasting consequences, and others with temporary effect. Think about all the decisions you have made from the time you got up this morning to this moment. You knew what to do. I’m not saying we always get it right but that we generally know what to do. But when our world gets turned upside down, when life feels like more than we can handle, when we feel powerless, that’s when we cry out, “What then should we do?” If that question comes from a deep place within then our response must also come from that same deep place. Our response to that question must begin not with what is happening around us, but with what is happening within us. It must begin with our sense of powerlessness. That does not mean we don’t have any choices, it means we must make different choices. We may be powerless to change the world but we can choose to change ourselves. We may be powerless to escape the problems that we find have been put upon us, but we can choose to live a different way. We can choose to turn to and listen and act upon the voice of God. Isn’t that what John is telling those who come to him? He doesn’t ask them to change the world but to change themselves. He doesn’t tell them to quit their jobs but to live life in a different way. The crowds who came to him could not eliminate poverty, but they could share what they have with the cold and hungry. The tax collectors who came to him could not overhaul the tax code, but they could be honest. The soldiers who came to him could not end the Roman occupation, but they could act with integrity and not abuse their power. In each of those situations John focuses on people and relationships. John points them to the coming Messiah and to his ways.

The world can seem like a noisy place and a mess, that is deafening us to what we might have the power to do. Even John the Baptist recognises his limitations and powerless. But there is hope coming to the people

he is addressing and that hope is still alive for us today. The good news is that Christmas is about the first part of that word, Christ. Coming to our weary world to be the light of the world, the one who will save us from the sin and strife. Who has the power to lighten our darkness if we turn to him.

The art of sending Christmas cards is certainly under threat with rising postage costs and the different ways of communicating over the internet. However I still like to send cards. Reading them in the card shop and musings over what is suitable for who is always fun. I need to guard myself as I have been known to chuckle and comment at some and forget there are other people in the shop, oops, hush the noise! One card that was cheeky and did have someone else share the mirth with me, had these words penned over the beautiful manger scene, "spoiler alert! He dies!". We shared a quiet giggle and then a moment of acknowledging the truth of those words. I don't know if my fellow shopper was a Christian or understood the message but we both acknowledged that isn't that what Christmas is about? That the baby Jesus all too soon in our calendar's faces the Easter events.

For a precious moment the cacophony of other shoppers disappeared and the noise was not evident. The Babel sounds' were not claiming our attention.

The Babel sounds' is a reference to Genesis 11. Remember the story of the Tower of Babel? How people were being divided into tribes with different languages so they could not communicate with each other. They decided to make themselves great by building a great city with an enormous tower—and without apparently acknowledging God. So God scattered them and they no longer had a common language. God hushed the noise of egocentricity that would threaten to drive people into sin and away from the presence of God. The story is very much about rebellion against God.

Christmas can seem like that. We know many of the Christmas traditions are Christianised from pagan traditions. The worship of the God Saturn was commemorated in the feast of saturnalia in December. The festival was a joyous time of exchanging gifts, feasting and sending greetings. On December 25th there was a festival specifically for celebrating the birth of the sun. So it's easy to see how non Christian festivals have continued to our present day.

When you think of Christmas greetings, have you noticed how the central letter of the word is often unspoken? We wish each other a merry *Chri*smas. I guess you might have had to reread that last word to realise that a letter had been omitted. The festivities have silenced the central Christian message. Christ is not celebrated. We need in these advent days to hush the noise and find ways to hear the true message of the good news of Christ coming into our world. The reality is that, yes he is born to die for our sins. But that is not the last word.

This week's symbol in the Methodist Church resource for Advent is glue or sellotape. How can we mend things that are broken, be like glue in the community to reduce disconnection and disintegration? What can we do to hush the noise and mend what we can in the places and people God has brought into our lives? We need to work to end division, selfish ambition, disconnection and fragmentation.

What should we do to hush the noise and make true sense of this special time? To reflect upon the faith that is our joy and salvation?

#### **STF 706**

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  
Longing for truth, we turn to you.  
Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.

*Christ, be our light!*  
*Shine in our hearts.*  
*Shine through the darkness.*  
*Christ, be our light!*  
*Shine in your Church gathered today.*

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.

Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,  
many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
making your kingdom come.

#### **Prayers of Intercession**

Heavenly Father, as once again we prepare for Christmas, help us to find time in our busy lives for quiet and thought and prayer. Help us to hush the noise. So that we may reflect upon the wonder of your love and allow

the story of the Saviour's birth to penetrate our hearts and minds. So may our joy be deeper, our worship more real, and our lives worthier of all that you have done for us through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer**

**We pray for the church:** We pray for those who serve us in our churches and our circuit. In this busy time give to them your strength and peace. Help them to find quiet times to rest and hush the noise of the multitude of demands that are necessary in this season. We pray also for those who will be celebrating this festival in so many different ways, and for those who dare not celebrate openly. For Christians in countries where there is persecution. Give to them the protection of your love. **Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer**

**We pray for Peace:** We think about the places we have heard about in the news, where the noise that drives out their peace is from warfare and conflict. We pray for peace and an end to all hostilities. We pray for the victims of war, the refugees, those robbed of their loved ones.

As we pray for peace we pray for peace among our families and friends. We pray for those who have quarrelled and need to be reconciled. Let your peace come into divided hearts and heal the hurt. We know that without justice there can be no peace. Let peace come when all people are respected, regardless of race and religion. Let peace come when trading weapons of mass destruction is a crime. Let peace come when the earth's resources are used wisely for the common good. Let peace come when money is used to serve and not enslave the world.

Your Son came as the Prince of Peace and brought a message of Peace for all people. Help us to be Peacemakers in our own homes, at our work or wherever we meet people, so that the peace and goodwill of Christmas can find a place in the hearts of all people. **Lord in Your Mercy, Hear our prayer**

**We pray for people in need:** We pray for homeless people and for refugees who have no country to call their own. Let your blessing be with those who work to help the homeless this Christmas, and give to all of us the determination to help where we can.

We pray for people who are lonely, those who are lonely because they have lost a partner, those who are lonely because no-one seems to care, those who are lonely because of handicap or illness. Let your presence be with those who are alone at this season of friendship and may we take your friendship to those whom we know will be alone this Christmas. **Lord in Your Mercy, Hear our prayer**

**We pray for those who are ill:** We pray for friends and family who are ill at this time, and remember them in the quietness of our hearts. We bring them to you in the confidence that you love them and know their every need and that your healing power is still the same today. Bless all that is being done for their recovery and give them the peace they need.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light which no darkness can quench. We remember friends and family who have died. We remember today those for whom we mourn and we give you our thanks for every fond remembrance. Help us to experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit within us, and to rejoice that they are at peace with you. **Amen. The Lord's Prayer.**

**STF 207.** (*Tune Westminster Abbey more frequently known with the hymn Christ is made the sure foundation STF 677*)

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
give the Lord his rightful place!  
Garlands, gleam with his charisma,  
tinsel, glisten with his grace!  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas  
welcome him with love and praise!

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
share him in each card you send.  
Give each gift in love and friendship,  
share his gifts which have no end.  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
Lord and Saviour, Guide and Friend.

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
light your candles from his flame!  
Hang your holly in his honour,  
trim each fir tree in his name!  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas  
celebrate the day he came!

Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
find his peace on busy days.  
May the messages of Advent  
guide us through the Christmas maze.  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
sing each carol in his praise!

## The Blessing

The angels are still singing. Prophets are still speaking. Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song, bring harmony. And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be ours, now and always. **Amen.**

