

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

www.stmagnus.org

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation



THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

SUNDAY 13th December

You can find our Sunday worship here.

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/xZB-f7Yr3SM>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

Joy

Let us celebrate the special joy of the Christmas season, as we wait in anticipation for the birth of Jesus, the warm fire in the dark nights, the buying of the Christmas tree, the putting up of the decorations, the planning of what we can give to others we care about.

But also remembering those, who like Mary and Joseph, are poor and a long way from friends and family. Let our joy not be a selfish one, but one that comes from extending our hospitality to those who are alone, or feel excluded.

Choir sing vs 3 of Christ be our light

Reading

Luke 1 46-55 read by Rosie Wallace

Mary's Song of Praise

Mary said:

With all my heart
I praise the Lord,
and I am glad
because of God my Saviour.
He cares for me,
his humble servant.
From now on,
all people will say
God has blessed me.
God All-Powerful has done
great things for me,
and his name is holy.
He always shows mercy
to everyone
who worships him.
The Lord has used
his powerful arm
to scatter those
who are proud.
He drags strong rulers

from their thrones
and puts humble people
in places of power.
God gives the hungry
good things to eat,
and sends the rich away
with nothing.
He helps his servant Israel
and is always merciful
to his people.
The Lord made this promise
to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his family
forever!

**Every time we read and listen
The Word is born in us again.**

Reflection

You don't have to listen to me to recognize over and over again how Christmas has become culturally relevant—just watch the Netflix Christmas films, Christmas mixes on radio stations as well as media reports of compassion and kindness toward the under-appreciated and underprivileged that are more plentiful at this time of year to know that the spirit of Christmas can lift everyone's boats, regardless of belief.

It's believed that the observance of Christmas that we have come to experience in the West was expanded by Charles Dickens' story, "A Christmas Carol," —so much so that last year a commercially well-received film about Dickens' creation of the story was entitled, "The Man Who Invented Christmas." In all his novels, Dickens promoted social justice and equality while casting a critical eye on the treatment of the poor in England. As a child, he himself had spent time in a poorhouse that incarcerated those without resources, and his writing of "A Christmas Carol" prevented him and his family from sharing a similar fate.

Christmas has become about more than Jesus. It's about the lifting of the human spirit. It's about kindness and compassion and the glory of being alive! The story of Christmas is so universal. Its "good will to men and women" and "peace on earth" and "joy to the world" speaks to people of every faith and of no religion at all.

This is a very important point—even Christians themselves are not necessarily drawn by theological propositions, but by how the Christmas narrative touches their hearts: an unwed pregnant Mary threatened with scandal, a reluctant Joseph, a wee baby in a manger, whose life is threatened by the government and whose family has been displaced by governmental policies, a star of hope overhead drawing sages from afar, and more angels and dreams per cubic foot of any biblical story, influencing Mary and Joseph, shepherds and wise men, and still others.

And like all mythological stories, there are parts of the Christmas tale that are fanciful or exaggerated, unbelievable or unverifiable. Those who told these stories wanted to convey meaning rather than history. They were looking backward from their experience of what Jesus had achieved in his life and ministry, his extraordinary teachings, his healing touch, his compassion and grace, his humility and faithfulness. The Christmas narrative was devised in hindsight, what *should have been* the world's welcome of one who would transform so much of the world.

It is the gospel writers of Matthew and Luke who give us the nativity stories of how Jesus was born. How many parallels in this story can you draw to our world today?

Jesus was born in troubled times. As part of the Roman Empire, his people and his country of Palestine were not allowed control of their own land. His parents, though poor, had to deal with the unequal tax plan of a demanding ruler—Caesar Augustus—requiring their migration from the ghetto of Nazareth to Bethlehem, where his pregnant mother and doting father ended up homeless.

But they, like all parents, believed there was something special about the baby born to them in a cave used as a stable.

So Mary sings of their vision for their child who might possibly transform life as they knew it:

God has scattered those who are proud. He drags strong rulers from their thrones and puts humble people in places of power. God gives the hungry good things to eat,
and sends the rich away with nothing.

Talk about ending income inequality! Talk about removing unjust, arrogant rulers!
Talk about empowering the marginalized!

No wonder King Herod, a collaborator with their Roman oppressors, was terrified
that he might be displaced, and tried to destroy the child.

No wonder that poor shepherds had a vision of a multitude of angels singing, "Peace
on earth, and good will among people!"

No wonder that astrologers from the East came from afar at the sight of a new star in
the heavens! They believed the world's fortunes were about to change.

Ultimately, what the Christmas story affirms is the vital importance and necessity of
spirituality in our world. Almost every founder of a spiritual path has such stories told
about them, either of their birth or of their lives. Those we might name as saints from
old or saints of our own time have wondrous stories told about them as well.

I dare say everyone has stories of wonder to tell—how you came to be here, in this
world. If only we all had been told when we were born of our divine spark, of our
sacred worth, of how we participate in divinity, what a different world it would be!

As Tiny Tim, the most vulnerable and marginalized character in Charles Dickens'
story, "A Christmas Carol," might say in the spirit of Christmas, "Bless us, everyone!"

prayer

"What if everyone had told me I had a spark of divinity in me when I was born?"

Light comes into the world through every baby born.

May we do everything possible to let that light shine, openly, honestly, imaginatively,
so other lights may be inspired with wisdom, compassion, and awe, bringing our
world out of the shadows and into the rainbow that is light's spectrum.

May those families torn apart by conflict or unjust immigration policies be reunited,
against all odds, in the face of extremely intentional evil, whether or not reunion is, at
this point, actually a possibility or just an impossible fantasy. May the irreparable
harms governments have inflicted upon families sear into all of our memories and
hearts, pointing our attention toward our complicity, drawing us toward deeper

discernment, demanding accountability from our government, pushing us all toward participation, education, until inhumanity is eradicated from our systems, the lies of the powerful vested interests are dismantled, and cruel, closed borders between countries are broken down and reshaped into an open, inviting threshold.

Amen

Blessing

Go in peace
into this Advent season.

Follow a star that's twinkling with courage,
blazing with possibility
to the space, the essence that is God.

And may the celestial brightness—source, spirit, sun—
be with you
enlighten, heal and empower you
and those you love

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his Spirit this
Advent and always.