

## **St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall**

[www.stmagnus.org](http://www.stmagnus.org)

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation](https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation)



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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.

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**SUNDAY 3<sup>rd</sup> January**

You can find our Sunday worship here.

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

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/CwZhBDZ3uSc>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

[stmagnuszoom@gmail.com](mailto:stmagnuszoom@gmail.com)

Opening meditation

What was old has become young again. What was weary, fresh and new once more.  
What was spent, given new life,  
and what was worn out, reborn.

But one thing remains:  
the Word,  
ancient and new,  
old and fresh in one moment. Our story and every story bound together

in the One, the Word,  
the Light,  
the Beginning.

May we begin anew  
in the wake of God,  
who always renews  
and calls us into life once more.

May this year be blessed  
with the work of justice,  
and the love of this community,  
and the word that binds us together.

Reading John 1: 1-9 read by Carole Macnaughton

In the beginning was the one  
who is called the Word.  
The Word was with God  
and was truly God.  
From the very beginning  
the Word was with God.  
And with this Word,  
God created all things.  
Nothing was made  
without the Word.  
Everything that was created  
received its life from him,  
and his life gave light

to everyone.  
The light keeps shining  
in the dark,  
and darkness has never  
put it out.  
God sent a man named John,  
who came to tell  
about the light  
and to lead all people  
to have faith.  
John wasn't that light.  
He came only to tell  
about the light.  
The true light that shines  
on everyone  
was coming into the world.

**This is the Gospel of Christ.  
May we hear wisdom**

Reflection

Let's not talk about Jesus at all. Let's talk about ourselves. Who are we? What is humanity and what are we evolving to be? Who do we carry around inside of us? How do we connect to the Divine, to the Source of all things.

And yes, let's talk about Christmas.

Christmas has become an archetype. That is its power. It means many things to many people, some of them just plain offensive. Among the latter would be the glut of materialism and consumerism that characterizes the season in a consumer-dominated culture; or the sentimentalism that wallows in nostalgia and the syrupy past etc. etc.

But what are the deepest meanings of this archetype called Christmas?

*Christmas is non-triumphal.* That is to say, it is not about the victory of any empire, any god, any tribe, any human enterprise—it is not history written by the conquerors. Quite the opposite, it is "history" or at least story, about the non-conquerors, the non-successful, the non-empire-builders.

A story about a couple pregnant and poor with no home or hotel establishment to take them in for the time of the child's arrival. A story not so far fetched given today's world of poverty and exclusion and immigrant migrations happening at the

southern borders of Europe and of the United States for example.

*Christmas is a story about the poor triumphing over life's tough challenges.*

Like bringing a child into the world. Bringing a child into a corner of the world that is not hospitable to the event because the parents don't have the means. Or because racism reigns.

Christmas is a story about bringing a child into the world in the midst of the four-legged ones, the animals, the hay, the manger where animals feed. Laying a child in a manger, not in a pristine bassinet; in a manger, not in a sterilized hospital ward.

*Christmas is a story about survival.*

But it is more than that. The archetype of Christmas also speaks to just what a child is. Who is a human child?

Not the son of a king, the son of a president, the daughter of a rock star—not the identity of a well known or well placed child, but the "Every child," including the poorest of the children born to the poorest of parents in the poorest of circumstances in a stable or a barn or a ghetto or a peasant village.

What about that child? What is his or her worth?

The news that Christmas brings is this: That a child who comes into the world, however unconnected, however poor and insignificant, however unheralded, is a *son or daughter of God*. Is wisdom incarnate. Is Emmanuel, God-among-us. Is worth a great deal.

There lies the Good News of the Christmas archetype. It stretches the imagination to suggest it, especially in light of how many humans have been murdered by humans in the past centuries in wars and more atrocities.

But that is the lesson staring us in the face on Christmas: That every child is precious; counts; counts more than we can imagine. Every child is a unique face of God, a unique image of the Divine One who remains so often shy and hidden but who becomes manifest in creatures including the human creature, the helpless baby who will grow, hopefully into a compassionate adult.

Is such a story credible?

Does it take more faith that we can muster in this hardened twenty-first century?

What are the implications of this lesson—for education, for example? Or for economics? For politics? For religion? For the media?

If every child is a son or daughter of God, a bearer of Divine Wisdom, what about every adult? Is this God-like-ness, this God-among-us, lost as we grow older? If so, why? If so, can we get it back? And how do we do that?

What would a society—or better a community—look like if we all committed to every human child and every human adult being an image of the living God? Being  
“another Christ

These are challenging questions. That is why Christmas is not going away, no matter how woefully consumerist culture beats up on it; or sentimentalism tries to hijack it; or how stifling institutional religion fails to plumb its deeper meaning.

“We are all meant to be mothers of God,” the great mystic Meister Eckhart preached in a Christmas sermon six centuries ago. The news does not stop with our being a divine child but that we ourselves *give birth* to the divine child on a regular basis—in our children, in our creativity, in our work, in our citizenship, in ‘all our relationships.’

Standing up for children not yet born who will be inheriting a severely hurting planet, a climate emergency, an ocean becoming ever more acidic, extinction of millions of insects, bees, animals, plants, trees, forests, birds—this is not honouring the children. It is not Christmas. Making choices to do something about it?

That is Christmas.

Prayer

May this be the time for peace in those places of conflict across the world. A time not for mourning and weeping, but a time of living and seeking transformation

A time for planting promises and harvests a time for dancing with neighbours of every creed and culture.

A time for embracing each other, embracing joy,  
embracing diversity and colour.

A time for breaking down prejudice in our community and  
ingrained sectarianism.

A time for building up  
the capacity of people, building up the strength that comes through the gifts of our  
neighbours and the future of our community.

A time for throwing away  
those biases against each other.

A time for losing that selfish approach, conceit in the world,  
greed for creation and a time for keeping the beauty of our world.

A time for speaking out  
against all that hurts and harms  
and a time for keeping silence  
instead of adding our voice to injustice

A time for birthing the future and a time for dying  
to all that corrupts and tarnishes our living together.

A time for healing all the hurts  
we have been part of in the past  
and a time for ending the ways of living that cause pain and brokenness.

In this time and every time, we pray for the right time, this time,  
our time, now time. Christ's time. So be it. Amen.

### Blessing

2020—a challenging year: Brexit,  
Coronavirus,  
Black Lives Matter.

2020—a life-changing year:  
confusing twists or turns,  
passing through "the valley of the shadow of death" to reaching the point of no  
return.

2020—an attentive year: watching and waiting, watching and lamenting, watching  
and reaching out.

2020—a year of the Lord: God is around us,  
God is with us,  
God is in us.

2021—an unknown year: BUT  
God is the past,  
God is the presence, God is the future,

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

