***St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall***

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

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation](http://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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You can find our Sunday worship here.

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

or on YouTube here.

[https://youtu.be/c68oaaKxVOo](https://avanan.url-protection.com/v1/url?o=https%3A//youtu.be/c68oaaKxVOo&g=YmQzNzI5MzVlMTUxZmEwMA==&h=Njc5NGI3MmFkOGM3NGM2NGM3NWZiMjUyZTY0NTdlMTBlNWViYWQxMjcwMDY2MWQyMThkYWRjZGE0MzliMWZlNQ==&p=YXAzOmNvczphdmFuYW46bzpjNjQzYzI5Yjk5NmNjMzQ0ZTNkNDk1MDU5NjY1ZDVjYjp2MTpo)

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here. stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

In lighting this candle, we declare our intention to live

as if the greatest gift in the world

were about to be placed into our hands

and as if the Giver has understood

our deepest needs, our most heartfelt prayers.

Look now!
It is happening again
Love like a high spring tide
is swelling to fullness and overflowing the banks of our small concerns

And here again is the star
that white flame of truth blazing the way for us
through a desert of tired words

Once more comes the music angel song that lifts our hearts and tunes our ears to the harmony of the universe, making us wonder how

we ever could have forgotten And now the magi within us gathers up gifts of gold and myrrh, while that other part of ourselves, the impulsive, reckless shepherd runs helter skelter with arms outstretched to embrace the wonder of it all

We have no words
to contain our praise
We ache with awe,
we tremble with miracle,
as once again,
in the small rough stable of our lives Christ is born

Reading **Luke 2 7-20**

﻿Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son; she put him in a simple cloth wrapped like a receiving blanket, and laid him in a feeding trough for cattle, because there was no room for them at the inn. There were shepherds in the area living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flock. The angel of God appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them; they were very much afraid. The angel said to them, “You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you—news of a great joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in David’s city, a saviour—the Messiah—has been born to you. Let this be a sign to you: you’ll find an infant wrapped in a simple cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in high heaven! And on earth, peace to those on whom God’s favour rests.” When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see this event that God has made known to us.” They hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger; once they saw this, they reported what they had been told concerning the child. All who heard about it were astonished at the report given by the shepherds. Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. The shepherds went away glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told.

Reflection

“The question for those presently at the centre is not whether they will include the presently marginalised at their table, but whether they will participate in the socially transformative work that is already taking place on the margins of their society.”

There were shepherds in the area living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flock. The angel of God appeared to them, and the glory of God shone around them; they were very much afraid. The angel said to them, “You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you—news of a great joy to be shared by the whole people.”

In Luke’s version of the narratives about Jesus’ birth, the author chooses to centre an unlikely community to receive the first announcement of “good news to all people.” This was the community of “shepherds living in the fields nearby.”

In Luke’s society, socially, politically and economically, shepherding filled one of the lowest occupational roles and shepherds bore the brunt of their lower social location. Shepherds were considered untrustworthy, and their work—according to some then-popular interpretations of the Jewish Law —made them continually unclean.

The most obvious implication is that the “good news” of the Jesus story first came to a community on the edges of Jesus’ society. His story was going to be first for those on society’s edges, not those in positions of privilege and power.

This narrative contradicts the one that modern, Westernized Christianity has so long used to equate Christianity with social respectability. Today, with few exceptions, the church has often missed out on building relationships and community with people pushed to the fringes of our larger society. I’m being generous when I say it this way: to simply say that Christian communities have “missed out” ignores the reality that the marginalised have been more than simply “missed.” The church has in many cases driven these folks to society’s fringes so that they’re marginalised by the very ones who carry the name of Jesus.

It matters how we understand each version of the stories of Jesus’ birth and what social, economic, political and even religious implications these stories would’ve had for their original listeners and contexts. When we read contextually today, we begin to see a rich field of insights for our work of social justice.

Historically, Christians have spent countless hours on apologetics defending certain details in Jesus’ birth narratives but ignored the more socially relevant implications of these stories. One example of a detail we’ve historically focused on is Matthew’s gospel’s virgin birth. This story element would have meant something to those living in Galilee continually bumping up against the Roman myths about the birth of Caesar Augustus. It says little to us today in our scientific age. Yet other elements of Jesus’ birth narratives in both Matthew and Luke still can offer much to us who are working for a world of love and justice today.

How we as Christians hear the Christmas story, read the Christmas story, and interpret the Christmas story matters! Reclaimed interpretations of the Christmas story emphasise details that we can’t afford to miss. Jesus being born into immense poverty, being announced to the socially outcast, bypassing the politically, economically, socially and religiously of the day, and his parents becoming violence-fleeing refugees for the wellbeing of their child—there is an entire foundation here on which to build a framework for Christians who are working toward social justice today.

The story whispers to us of the need for communities to prioritise the poor, the insignificant, forgotten, and the marginalised. These are the people who gathered at this lowly manger and dared to believe that the babe who lay there, this good news, really belonged to them.

The message to the shepherds was, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.”

The babe in a manger would not affirm the dominant structure of society of inequity, oppression, exploitation. Instead, he would grow up to gather the outcast, the socially marginalised, those labelled and treated as less than by the privileged and powerful. He called for a society that did this, too, and it began with his early followers. Early communities of Jesus-followers were almost wholly comprised of people from society’s edges.

Prayer

As love is spread within the world through the birthing of Jesus Christ, let us encircle the earth with our prayers:

We pray today for all children, especially those whose lives are not happy. We think of the ones who have not been looking forward

to a lovely Christmas meal and who did not receive any presents.

We pray for all children at this Christmas time.

We pray for all mothers this day who are anxious for their families.

We remember those who have little care around them when they give birth and who know that they will not be able to feed their children well

or give them the comfort of a safe home.

We pray for those mothers who live in places of war, or among other forms of violence, and who long each day for peace and safety.

We pray for all mothers at this Christmas time.

We pray today for all fathers around the world.

We think especially of those who tread life journeys of fear with their families – those who are refugees or desperately seeking work, those who look out at empty fields due to drought or floods or who dread the next days because they can see no future.

We pray for all fathers at this Christmas time.

We gather into prayer all those who are lonely or lost today –

those for whom Christmas is painful or sad, who dread the joy of others

with its comment on what they do not have. May all people be held close in the enveloping arms of the Spirit this Christmas time.

Blessing

L; The bairn has let out his first cry,
**All; the angels have sung their heavenly chorus,**

L; the shepherds have come to bear witness,

**All; and we too are now witnesses to Love’s gift for each and every one of us.**

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