

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[St Magnus Cathedral Facebook page](#)

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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.

You can find our Sunday worship

[here on Facebook](#)

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

or [on YouTube here](#)

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

We lit the first

for the ones who along with Mary

waited

who longed with their souls

knowing God was on the way

that God would do something

for the lowly

Their waiting is over

And we relight the light
for those who are still waiting
waiting for God
to be born in the name of justice
and we shall wait with them

We lit the second
for the one who with the angels
had a message to give
who proclaimed
that God is among them
and their message is now fulfilled

And we relight the light
for those
who still believe in that message
that God is born in the world
and we will proclaim it with them

We lit the third
for the ones who with the shepherds
did not fear
God becoming human
they will never fear again

And we relight the light
for those
who still 'fear not'
and believe in peace for our world
and we will believe with them

We lit the fourth
for the ones who with the magi
travelled within the promise
of God being born
Their journey has finished

And we relight the light
for those who still travel
within that promise
and we will journey with them.

We lit the fifth
on Christmas Day
The light is here
Christ is born

But this candle
we do not extinguish
for it is not yet complete
till all are fed
all have shelter
all have a place to belong

This light
is for the ones who still wait
the ones who still believe the message
the ones who still do not fear
the ones who still join the journey
and we will carry it with them
still

Reading Matthew 2; 1-12

After Jesus' birth—which happened in Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod—astrologers from the East arrived in Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the newborn ruler of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay homage." At this news Herod became greatly disturbed, as did all of Jerusalem. Summoning all the chief priests and religious scholars of the people, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem of Judea," they informed him. "Here is what the prophet has written: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, since from you will come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "

Herod called the astrologers aside and found out from them the exact time of the star's appearance. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, after having instructed them, "Go and get detailed information about the child. When you have found him, report back to me—so that I may go and offer homage, too." After their audience with the ruler, they set out. The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child lay. They were overjoyed at seeing the star and, upon entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and paid

homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented the child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went back to their own country by another route.

Reflection

The story of the birth of Jesus is deeply embedded in western culture. The story takes images from the gospels of Luke and Matthew and compiles a narrative of God coming to humankind to create peace and justice. There are some details about Jesus' early life about which we can be quite certain: he came from a large family in the small hamlet of Nazareth, worked as a day labourer, and initially was a disciple of John the Baptist. But of his birth, we know nothing.

So, where we may ask, did the stories come from? The answer is that they came from a few people who were so caught up in what Jesus had said and done, that they exalted his birth and created a story of cosmic origin and intervention. The details are familiar. An angel appeared to the virgin Mary, informing her that she had been chosen to bring into human flesh the one who would save the world. Joseph was told the pregnancy was not suspect, that the child in Mary's womb was a manifestation of God's power. When Jesus was born, angels appeared to shepherds in the field. Wise men/kings from the east followed a star brilliant beyond all others that led to the manger. We all know the story. Scholars tell us that they are products of the imagination, created by the followers of Jesus who wanted to underline his status as absolutely special. They are fabrication with a purpose, not intended to be taken literally, but definitely to be taken seriously. Fiction with a purpose, but what is the purpose?

In order to understand why the stories were written, we need to understand the context in which they were written, and that context, quite simply, is one of almost total wealth inequality, created and sustained by an elite who oppressed the poor and destitute. The message of Jesus was the opposite: loving human community wherein brothers and sisters cared for one another and shared the little they had. The gospel writers were part of that community and the images they use in their

stories are a powerful repudiation of the oppression rampant in society. A poor girl is chosen. The destitute one, born amongst the animals, is the one sent by God. The angels appear to the poor in the fields and not to those who hold the wealth and power. The wisest of kings bring gifts and bow to the true king, not to Caesar, not to the oppressors.

The Christmas story is one of comfort and sweetness, if you will allow me that word. But we must not become so enamoured by the Silent Night that we miss the revolutionary impact of the imagery. God appears in the poor places on earth and not in the councils of the rich and powerful. Many today do not use the word God, and we can substitute other words. The moral arc of the universe. Rightness. Universal love. The words are many but the idea is singular: the way of righteousness holds strong against the way of oppression.

Like the star of Bethlehem, the story of Christmas guides the way in the darkness. As in the time of Jesus, the forces of greed and ego are appearing with renewed strength and must be countered with the power of love. The Nativity is our assurance that love will win out.

Prayer

Between Hogmanay and Ne'er Day is a daring place
where futures are chosen.

It is just a moment
between one tick on midnight and another but between looking one way
and then looking another,
between looking back
and turning forward,
that few seconds
is the place where decisions are made about what to live towards
for the rest of the year.

It is a moment
where nothing is tied down, nothing is fixed,
nothing is inevitable.

It is a moment
to turn from past
to future
moving our hands and heart
from what supported us in the past to hold what will give support to us in
the days to come.

And that moment
is the moment of faith, not just in letting go, but deciding
what shall we hold to, what shall we point to.

It is these few moments
where futures are won or lost:
shall we resolve to do as we have always done or shall we dare our faith to
make a choice that will challenge us
but change the world;
tire us
but give life to others;
weaken us
but strengthen our neighbours?

May we be blessed
in our moment of faith,
between the ticking towards midnight and find in the future
a strength,
a hope,
a fresh place to meet
the kingdom
in the one who is there
between Hogmanay and Ne'er Day ready to travel
into the unmade days
of this new year.

Blessing

On the day when The weight deadens
On your shoulders And you stumble,
May the clay dance To balance you.

And when your eyes Freeze behind
The grey window And the ghost of loss

Gets in to you,
May a flock of colours, Indigo, red, green,
And azure blue, Come to awaken in you
A meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays In the currach of thought
And a stain of ocean Blackens beneath you,
May there come across the waters
A path of yellow moonlight
To bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
May the clarity of light be yours,
May the fluency of the ocean be yours,
May the protection of the ancestors be yours.
And so may a slow
Wind work these words
Of love around you, An invisible cloak
To mind your life.

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