



# St Nicolas Church, Cranleigh

## WORSHIPPING AT HOME

## CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT

## AND MORNING 2020



**WELCOME . . . .** Shout for joy, the whole earth and everything within. Rejoice! For Light has come into the world. The angels' song rings in the air, a child has been born. Hallelujah! The Saviour of the world is here.

**CONGRATULATIONS . . . . to Peter and Sheelagh Poole, as they celebrate their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on Sunday – Peter will be leading the 11am Service this Sunday in Church and on livestream!**

**CHRISTMAS WORSHIP RESOURCES:**

**COLLECT FOR MIDNIGHT:**

Eternal God,  
who made this most holy night  
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:  
bring us, who have known the revelation  
of that light on earth,  
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**COLLECT FOR CHRISTMAS MORNING:**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
your birth at Bethlehem  
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:  
accept our heartfelt praise  
as we worship you,  
our Saviour and our eternal God.

## **PSALM: 98**

Sing to the Lord a new song,  
for he has done marvellous things.  
His own right hand and his holy arm  
have won for him the victory.  
The Lord has made known his salvation;  
his deliverance has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.  
He has remembered his mercy and faithfulness  
towards the house of Israel,  
and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.  
Sound praises to the Lord, all the earth;  
break into singing and make music.  
Make music to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the voice of melody.  
With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
sound praises before the Lord, the King.  
Let the sea thunder and all that fills it,  
the world and all that dwell upon it.  
Let the rivers clap their hands  
and let the hills ring out together before the Lord,  
for he comes to judge the earth.  
In righteousness shall he judge the world  
and the peoples with equity.

### **FIRST READING: *Isaiah 9:2-7.***

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.  
For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onwards and for evermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

**GOSPEL READING: *John 1:1-14***

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What

has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

### **POST COMMUNION PRAYER FOR MIDNIGHT:**

God our Father,  
in this night you have made known to us again  
the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:  
confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him  
until the day dawns  
and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.  
To him be glory both now and forever.

### **POST COMMUNION PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS MORNING:**

God our Father,  
whose Word has come among us  
In the Holy Child of Bethlehem:  
May the light of faith illumine our hearts  
And shine in our words and deeds;  
Through him who is Christ the Lord.

**SERMON FOR MIDNIGHT AND 8AM CHRISTMAS DAY (written by The Rector, Canon Roy Woodhams):**

One of the great joys of our lead up to Christmas, here, this year, has been the ‘Cranleigh Shines’ initiative. I’m so grateful to Alison Hendy, whose brainchild this was, and for the way that people have taken it on board, lighting up their doors and windows with stars, and also for the way it has spread; around Surrey, beyond to Oxfordshire, Yorkshire, and even to the Diocese of New York in the USA (to name but a few of the places who took up the challenge!) And I am grateful too, to Emma McLaughlin, Alison’s Daughter, who masterminded the artwork for the advertising material that helped to ‘give wings’ to this great idea!

‘Light’ is one of the great themes of Advent and Christmas – each year we light the candles on our Advent wreath, reminding us of those other themes of ‘Love’, ‘Joy’, ‘Peace’ and ‘Hope’ in the coming child, for whom we have now lit the fifth candle.

In the first reading, we heard the Prophet Isaiah, writing some 700 years before the birth of Jesus, predicting a *‘people who walked in darkness, seeing a great light!’* And of *‘light shining, on a land of deep darkness’* as the child is born for his people!

And in the Gospel reading, John's beautiful, poetic, account of the coming child as *'The Word of God'*, we heard that *"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world"* as foretold by the other John – John the Baptist!

In this strangest of Christmases, many of us may feel as though we are treading a *'land of deep darkness'*? I know that many are alone for the first time this Christmas, many are missing the loved ones who they have not seen all year, many are suffering from the real effects of Covid-19 – the loss of loved ones, the loss of jobs and livelihoods, and the fear of what the future holds!

But the message of Christmas is that the Light of Christ can shine, even in the world's darkest places, and that 'Light' and 'Hope' go hand in hand!

I began writing this sermon a few days ago, sat in my lounge, just as it was getting dark, and the sun was setting outside, on what had been a beautiful winter's afternoon – our Christmas tree was twinkling merrily in the bay window, and our 'Cranleigh Shines' stars were shining out into the garden. Whilst I know that not many people have been coming up our driveway at the moment (though there has been an alarmingly frequent stream of Amazon delivery drivers!), I also know that my light, along with all the other lights that have been shining from the windows of our village, have been playing their part in the 'Cranleigh Shines' initiative, and sending that message of light and hope to all of those people I listed earlier, who are feeling the pain of walking through the *'land of deep darkness'*!

There is a true story of a family who lived in a coastal house on the shores of one of the Southern States of America – they were right in the path of an approaching hurricane! Fearing for their lives, the family took to their

car, but as they drove, the winds blew stronger and stronger, the rain became heavier and heavier, and the water rose higher and higher! They began to wonder if they had made a mistake in leaving home. Maybe they couldn't make it safely at all!

Suddenly the Father, who was driving, lost the road, and the car went into a ditch. It was completely stuck, and water started to pour in. It didn't take them long to realise that if they stayed in the car they would drown. There was only one choice left — leave the car behind and start walking.

The wind tore at them. Palm trees had been blown down everywhere. They waded through water that was nearly two feet deep. They were wet and cold, and it was getting dark. They hardly knew where to go.

It was then that one of them spotted a little glimmer of light. It was only a candle, but that candle showed them the way to a house that was still safe. The people who lived there had placed the candle in the window for that very reason — to guide people to their home, where inside, they could find protection and warmth!

The story reminds us that it only takes a small light to shine in the darkness, and as children of the light, we, as Christians, are all called to share our little bit of light with those in our communities who are so desperately in need of that warmth and protection!

Further on in St John's Gospel, Jesus says, *'I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness'*.

To summarize; carry these thoughts in your hearts this Christmas:

- That it only takes a small light to make a big difference.
- That Light and Hope go hand in hand.
- That the Light of the Coming Christ is for each of us today, both for ourselves and to share.
- That we may receive that light with love, joy, peace and hope.
- And that in the darkness of our present time, Cranleigh may truly 'shine' with the light of Christ!

Amen.

## **SERMON FOR 11AM CHRISTMAS MORNING (written by Revd Rutton Viccajee)**

John Ch 1 v 14: And the word became flesh, and dealt among us, full of grace and truth

What is truth? Now there's a question.

Are you a conspiracy theorist? Do you think Bill Gates is using the anti-virus vaccine to inject us all with microchip trackers? Do you think you can catch the virus from 5G masts? Is Covid-19 no more dangerous than seasonal flu? Even though the death rate is currently about five or ten times higher? Do you disbelieve the death rate figures anyway? Do you think the whole thing is a hoax? Or a plot exploited by "Big Pharma"? If so, and there are many many people who *do* believe these things, then I am not out to argue with you, or to rubbish your views. That's not my job. My job is to ask, I hope kindly, I hope respectfully, this question: *what then is truth?*

In John's Gospel, in Christ, we have a perfect blend of both grace and truth, wonderfully true, clearly stated, and yet almost impossible to comprehend:

Verse 14: And the word became flesh, and dealt among us, full of grace and truth.

And don't suppose that non-faith people are not *also* out on a quest to seek this truth: they are. They seek truth about God, about life, about creation and its purpose, about history, about humanity, and about us: We can see this most starkly in chapter 18 of the same Gospel when a tired, cynical, political manipulator asks Jesus "what is truth?" Possibly the most ironic question in all human history. Because Truth was standing right in front of Pilate in the person of Jesus Christ. And deep down, he probably knew it.

Other non-faith people also ask that question. And time and again, John's Gospel provides the answer.

For example: who said this? *"The eventual goal of science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe"*.

Stephen Hawking said that in 'A Brief History of Time' on page 10.  
*A single theory?*

Back to John chapter one: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life...

Sounds pretty much like a single scientific theory of the whole universe to me. The mystery of life, set out in simple and direct language, and revealed in the life of Jesus Christ, both then and now.

Now, and not just then? Yes, now. If Christ is the Truth then, then He is the Truth also now.

So, back to the question – *what is truth?* I have mentioned two non-believers in Christ posit that question: Pontius Pilate, and Stephen Hawking.

Set against their question is an answer provided by the writer of John's Gospel:

And I, for one, believe this man, *because he is a witness; because he was there:*

“And the Word became flesh and lived *among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,*<sup>1</sup> full of grace and truth. “

John, the disciple. One of the Twelve. One of the inner circle of three.

John who lived and breathed with Christ those three incredible life-changing years. John who leaned against the breast of Christ at that fateful Last Supper – he was *that* close to the Word made flesh. John who, wonderfully, incredibly, fantastically, was loved by Christ in such a unique way, that he is never mentioned by name, only by his tag line: ‘The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved’. And what a tag line that is.

Quite apart from all the dreadful isolations, dangers, difficulties and deaths the virus has caused this year, it seems to me one of the greatest dangers is not knowing what or who to believe. The news changes daily,

the politicians and experts and scientists are pressed for instant answers, when in truth, they need months to analyse data to find truth; months we simply have not got. And so, some believe this, and some believe that. And the measures taken sometimes seem complex and arbitrary.

This Christmas, I hope you will join me in believing what we *do* know: that although life is indeed a wonderful, but also a very difficult, mystery, we can nevertheless find the truth about God, and indeed ourselves, in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The stable walls may seem a little flimsy to contain the secrets of the universe, hidden incredibly, in the tiny, divine baby inside. But those walls are made of faith. And for millions, they are rock solid. Because they, too are witnesses to the love of Christ. In other words, within those stable walls, even when we cannot understand all, we can, nevertheless, find the love of Jesus, and the truth of Jesus, for ourselves. Up, close and personal.

Next year, I invite you to come on, or continue, that journey of faith. We won't know all the answers. There will be difficulties as well as good times ahead, we know that. But together, we can choose to journey in friendship, and in faith, and discover, or further discover, life worth living, in that very special love of Jesus. Amen.

### **CHRISTMAS BLESSING:**

May the joy of the Angels,  
The eagerness of the Shepherds,  
The perseverance of the Wise Men,  
The obedience of Mary and Joseph,  
And the Light and Peace of the Christ-child  
Be God's gift to each of you this Christmas!

