

Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit

SERVICE AT HOME:

Sunday 28 December 2025

'The escape to Egypt'

Prepared by Graham Hepburn

Call to worship

The hymn StF 165, 'Advent candles tell their story,' has been used in some churches in the circuit during advent. As we think today about Joseph, the escape to Egypt and the Holy Family becoming refugees, we use as our call to worship, an additional verse to that hymn written by our own circuit local preacher, Pat Fry.

'Joseph's courage, loving caring
Giving Christ a home
Listening to the angel's message
Trusting God alone,
Through such caring, loving, giving
Faithful living
God is known.'
(Pat Fry)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_5pYE2ToxI

Advent candles tell their story
as we watch and pray,
longing for the Day of Glory,
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness
changed for gladness
on that Day.

Prophet voices loudly crying,
making pathways clear;
glimpsing glory, self-denying,
calling all to hear.
Through their message - challenged, shaken –
hearts awaken:
God is near!

John the Baptist, by his preaching
and by water poured,
brought to those who heard his teaching
news of hope restored:
'Keep your vision strong and steady,
and be ready
for the Lord.'

Mary's gift, beyond all telling,
was to give Christ room.
She gave God a human dwelling
in a mother's womb.
Who could guess the final story?
– cross and glory;
empty tomb!

Advent candles tell their story
on this Christmas Day.
Those who waited for God's glory:
they prepared the way.
Christ is with us: loving, giving,
in us living,
here today!

Mark Earey(b1965), Copyright © 2002 Mark Earey

Listen, read, pray or sing along

We continue in song, 'The silent stars shine down on us'(StF 231), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkHbQNTm9mA>

The silent stars shine down on us with bright but
sightless eye,
Unmindful of our little earth, of us who live and
die.
Are we but grains of stranded sand beside a
cosmic sea
That lie unvalued and unseen in such immensity?

Creator of all stars you came to grace our transient
race.
In Christ you spoke a Word that broke the silences
of space.
Still through that Word you call our hearts to know
that we are known,
To trust we do not walk through time unvalued
and alone.

We see the star the wise men saw and hope again
is stirred.
We track the footprints left in time by your
incarnate Word.
We see them climb a lonely hill where Love is left
to die –
The Love that formed the farthest star and hears
the faintest cry.

O Christ, the bright and morning Star whose radiance does not fade,
Whose glory filled the universe before the planets played:

Come, heal our hearts of blinding doubt till faith shall end in sight.

Shine down upon our darkened earth and conquer sin's long night.

Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr.(1923-2007)

Prayers of praise

Loving God, we thank you for the waters that surround and shape the South East District:

the English Channel, the Mediterranean Sea, the Gozo Channel, the Adur, Arun, Thames and the Medway rivers.

We thank you for rocks and cliffs, for beaches and rolling seas.

We are grateful for lighthouses to warn of danger, for lifeboats to rescue the fearful and the lost.

We pray for those seeking the haven of our shores.

Loving God, who made the heavens and the earth, who watches over the raging of the waves and the playful holiday makers on the beach, watch our rivers and seas, for in them we see your majesty and creative power, your beauty and love. **Amen.**

David Hinchcliffe, Former Chair, South East District, (Day 5, 2025/26 Methodist Prayer Handbook 'Our Story, Our Song)

To God who creates us, glory;

To God who redeems us, glory;

To God who calls us by name, glory;

To the Lord who is with us through waters and floods, praise;

To the Lord who is with us as we pass through fire, praise;

To the Lord the Holy One, who is our Saviour, praise;

To God who has ransomed us, glory;

To God who values us above price, glory;

To God who calls us beyond fear, glory;

To the only wise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be praise and glory,

Now and to the ages of ages. **Amen**

(Alan and Clare Amos, Words For Today, 08/11/2003, ©2002 International Bible Reading Association)

A prayer of confession(*)

In the light of Christmas,

in the light of the gift of Christ Jesus our Lord,

in the light of all this goodness and joy,

we want to cast off our failings:

our failure to stand with others in their weeping and sorrow,

our turning away from the pain of others,

our cowardice in the face of injustice and violence

that affects the weakest and poorest the most.

Forgive us, Lord, and change our hearts. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Bible Reading, Matthew 2: 13-23

The escape to Egypt

When they(the magi) had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'[a]

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and

refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'[b]

The return to Nazareth

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.'

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

[a] [Matthew 2:15](#) Hosea 11:1

[b] [Matthew 2:18](#) Jer. 31:15

Reflection

However many years old it is, the Bible has a way of making itself relevant to our lives and the issues we face. Nothing could be more relevant to the European political situation than the subject of refugees, and we are faced on this Sunday after Christmas with the challenge of seeing the Holy Family as refugees, fleeing the persecution of King Herod. For a second time in the Christmas narrative in Matthew's gospel, we are given the picture, of God speaking to Joseph in a dream, in this case telling him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt, for the safety of the child. (The first time is Matthew 1 verses 18 to 25, when Joseph is told that the child Mary is carrying is conceived by the Holy Spirit.)

As we think of the escape to Egypt, and the political debates in this country about refugees, I hope that my choice of the prayers which we have shared makes sense. Firstly, Revd David Hinchcliffe's prayer from the current Methodist Prayer Handbook about the waters around the South East of England, and those seeking the haven of our shores. Secondly, the older prayer from 2003, praising the Lord who is with us through waters and floods.

I am sorry if a leaf blower is an integral part of your gardening equipment. To me, they are

pointless. For years, gardeners would sweep up the leaves into a bag, or onto a compost heap, and the leaves were dealt with. All that leaf blowers do is blow the leaves off the area that the gardener is clearing, so that they become someone else's problem, they are blown out onto the pavement, only to return to that or another garden next time the wind blows in the wrong direction. The gardener thinks that by blowing the problem away it is solved, but it comes back and either that gardener or another then has to deal with the problem again.

I think of the leaf blower when I hear UK politicians debating refugees and immigration. That blowing the refugees back across the English Channel is in some way dealing with the problem. That by focussing exclusively on the last twenty miles of the journey they are going to solve a problem that began hundreds or thousands of miles away when the refugees left their homeland; because of

- war, probably caused by the involvement from one of the superpowers; or because of
- global population growth and climate change meaning that their families mode of living going back generations is no longer sustainable; or because
- they have seen the western lifestyle portrayed in streamed programmes or advertisements on their mobile phones and wish to come to the richer countries for their fair share of that lifestyle.

The Bible is clear how refugees should be treated. The Old Testament tells us of the responsibility that a just society has to take care of those who come into it as refugees. If we choose to ignore that, then surely we cannot avoid the challenge of this lesson today, picturing for us the Holy Family, Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus, having to flee for their lives to Egypt to avoid the slaughter of the young children by Herod's forces, in the same way that refugees from countries such as Ukraine and Syria have fled to Europe in recent days.

Joseph showed courage both in taking the pregnant Mary as his wife, and arguably the couple showed even greater courage in being prepared to flee to a foreign country. In both

cases, Joseph trusted the answers given to him in his prayers, wherever they led him. Should we be wondering as we look at refugees today, are they people of faith like Joseph, following the path which they believe that God has spoken to them to follow?

The pro immigration demonstrators chant 'Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here.' Perhaps today, as we think of the flight from Israel to Egypt of Joseph, Mary and their newborn son Jesus, the question for us is, 'Ask it loud, ask it clear, are Joseph and Mary welcome here?'

Prayers of intercession(*)

Lord, we pray for all those affected by tyranny,
the children who are victims of someone else's war,
someone else's prejudice, someone else's cruelty.
We grieve over the violence in our world
and the suffering of the innocent.

We ask for your help, Lord,
you who have also suffered,
you who see far more than we ever can,
right into the deepest darkness.

Lord, we lift the grieving, the despairing,
the casualties of humanity's horrors,
and plead their cause to you today.

We pray for the children stolen
and given weapons to bear;
for those enslaved, violated, abused.

We pray for the mothers and fathers
who could not save their children,
whose lives are a lament over what they have lost.

O God of love, hear us,
O God of light, vanquish the darkness.
Come, our great rescuer,
and make your presence known.
In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

If you give your weekly offering through an envelope scheme or in cash, please set it aside, and pray with those who give using Standing orders.

Gracious God, accept these gifts, our money, and all our offerings, and with them our lives, to be used in mission and service through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen, read, pray or sing along

Our final hymn is 'Who could think that what was needed, (StF 222)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGtYOat6coE>

Who would think that what was needed
to transform and save the earth
might not be a plan or army,
proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision,
that a child should lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder;
monarchs scorn and angels sing;
such a place as none would reckon
hosts a holy helpless thing.
Stable beasts and by-passed strangers
watch a baby laid in hay;
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.

Centuries of skill and science
span the past from which we move,
yet experience questions whether,
with such progress, we improve.
While the human lot we ponder,
lest our hopes and humor fray,
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas Day.
John L. Bell(b1949) and Graham Maule(b1958)

A sending out prayer(*)

Lord, at this time of bright lights and celebrations,
thank you for the joy and blessings of the season.
Please help us as we go to remain mindful
of those who see more darkness than light
and feel more sorrow than joy.
Help us to do all we can to show them your love.
Amen.

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