

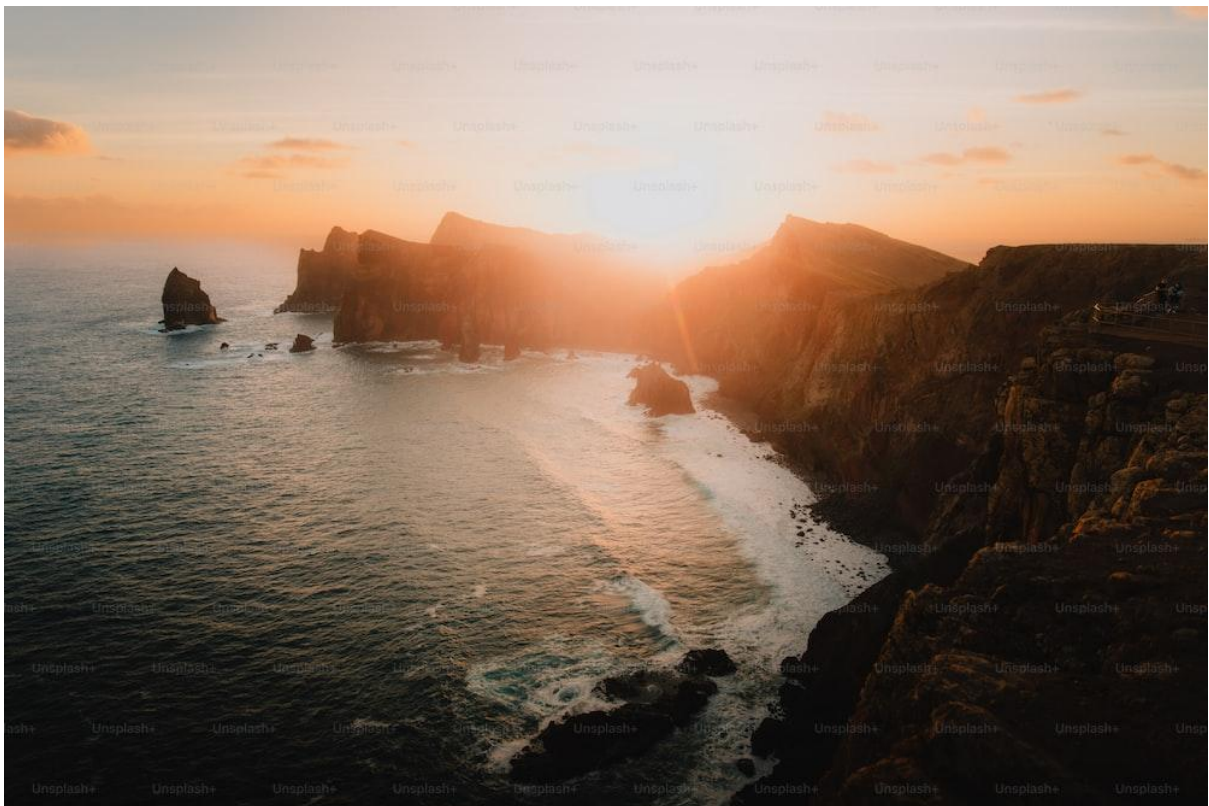
Peace and Quiet in Troubled Times

December 2025

Welcome to this opportunity to give yourself time and space away from the daily tasks, worries and fears which put our minds in turmoil. You are invited to focus on the music, words and pictures. You may find it helpful to read the poems out loud and then to keep silences in between, entering into an oasis of calm, to engage in 'mindfulness'. Each month we explore a different theme, relevant to our common experiences of life and the world around us. We follow the pattern of the seasons of the Church year.

Please click on the underlined text beneath the images to hear the music via YouTube. Please do skip any adverts that appear.

Letting in the Light



December

When the sea is huge and raging
and early in the afternoon the dark is down;
out there, at the very ending of the land,
an orange softness to the sky, and then
the clouds are parted for a moment blue,
and all the islands flooded in a brokenness of light.

You stand and watch and want to be there
in that blessing of the light, and wonder
if anyone is standing in its midst and bathed,
baptised in this December's breath of gold.

There is no need for envy:
it is enough to wait for light to fall
and in the waiting know that one day it will fill
your hands, your heart.

Kenneth Steven

Advent affirmation

In the tender compassion of our God:
the dawn from on high shall break upon us
to shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death;
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

From The Benedictus, the Song of Zechariah Luke 1:78-79



<https://youtu.be/zc1Zoz-NUro>

Benedictus – Karl Jenkins from The Armed Man

The Word

*'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God...*

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.'

John 1:1 and 14a

The word

Sometimes
words are not enough
for everything we have to say.

Words can't beat like a heart
A verb won't sweat or bleed.
A noun doesn't get thirsty.
An adjective cannot feel pain.
Something gets lost
in translation into words.

So when God
needed to express
a love deeper than words
he used body language
of a kind not known on earth before.

Godfrey Rust

The word was squeezed out like a drop
of ointment, a single spot

of water in the desert, or the first tiny crack
in the fault before an earthquake; the word was

a whisper barely audible, but in the hollow
of our hearts it echoed, and the echo grew

to a sound that made the whole world
stop its ears in case its ringing should crack
the deep glazing of our self-satisfaction and into

our earthen vessels pour its treasure. The word

broke in like a visitation of angels,
its bright light scattering the thin

flocks of our achievements that we graze
so carefully in high, unfriendly pastures.

Godfrey Rust

Christmas Word

When he was born,
He couldn't speak a word,
That Word made flesh.
All he could do was cry
The human cry of hunger
And the need for love.
He had to learn his words
At Mary's knee and Joseph's bench;
Words of the Kingdom values
That informed their lives.
And when he spoke,
It was again Mary's Magnificat,
Turning our expectations upside down:
Good News of transformation.
God's Word, and ours
If we too give it flesh
And live Magnificat:
Meeting the human cry
Of hunger and the need for love.

Ann Lewin



<https://youtu.be/iO7ySn-Swwc>

O come, O come, Emmanuel – The Piano Guys

Perspectives on Bethlehem



Chaos

Chaos stalked through Bethlehem!
The town was far too small
to cope with crowds compelled to answer
Caesar's census call.

Many strangers spent the night,
denied a decent bed,
huddled in a shepherd's cave,
a barn or cattle shed.

Lengthy lines of travellers trudged
on sore and blistered feet,
ankle-deep in dust and dirt,
struggling up the street.

Does God care about the chaos
mocking modern life -
flood and famine, terror, torture,
poverty and strife?

Rough and arrogant, the rich,
pockets lined with gold,
claimed the few remaining rooms,
refuge from the cold;

Does he grieve with refugees
in camp or prison cell?
Has Christmas any relevance
for those whose life is hell?

while the poor, of no account,
who begged for bed and board,
were jostled, elbowed, pushed aside,
overlooked, ignored.

Only think, when dogged by doubt
or cynical despair,
when chaos stalked through Bethlehem,
Christ, himself, was there.

Sheila Kelly

Donkeys brayed and soldiers cursed
in voices harsh and shrill,
O little town of Bethlehem -
anything but still!

Opening Night

A spotlight locked on a small provincial town.
A shed converted for the purpose.
The steamy breath of animals,
Shuffling at a teenager's cries.
And finally,
A different cry, the sweat mopped away.
The quiet.
The crunch of straw pressed down.
Her child asleep.

Not many came,
Though this was where they said it would be.
A few out-of-towners from the east,
A handful of nightworkers on the skive.
Not many came
To see this ordinary sight,
The new Life lit by a singular light.

Mark Greene

BC-AD

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect
Walked haphazard by starlight
straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.

U A Fanthorpe



https://youtu.be/vJdl1bhd_3U

Wachet Auf (Sleepers Awake) – JS Bach

Strange

It was the matter of a donkey and a journey;
the homelessness of a town loud with strangers,
and the corner of some outhouse by the way
where a mother birthed her child in straw at last.

It was a matter of a star that led
strangers to the strangeness of that place;
and the gifts they brought to leave beside the child
who'd become one day the strangest and most unexpected king.

Kenneth Steven

The Other Shepherd

I stayed. Someone had to.
Three in the morning and the cold
like a rusty knife. The fire down to a dragon's eye;
a cave that glowed. The whole globe of the moon
broke into the skies' maroon hugeness;
lit them, sliding and glittering
down towards the sleep of the town
clasped in the crook of the hills.
Then nothing. The wind breathed, blew the moon away.
A whole two hours I watched, listening to the dark
huge about me, till the fire
gusted into a rubble of dust.
Then without warning they were back in a babble
with some story big as a fisherman's brag,

eyes wide with its size:
it poured loud and confused as coins
scatter from a bag.
I nodded and smiled;
curled round into the blanket of night
and closed my eyes -
they'd have forgotten all about it by morning.
Kenneth Steven

Out of the Blue...

The historic present.

And future perfect
Concentrated in him
Infinite love locked in linen.

The answer,

To purpose,
and the ache of the heart
and the clench of the knotted will,

Poised to pour
Fulness
Cascading
Beyond the brim of all we are

The king
Laying his gifts at our feet.

Mark Greene



<https://youtu.be/SW06Q5pl7-Q>

Handel Harp concerto in B flat major/Langlamet

Letting in the Light

Nativity

When the miracle happened it was not
with bright light or fire -
but a farm door with the thick smell of sheep
and wind tugging at the shutters.

There was no sign the world had changed for ever
or that God had taken place;
just a child crying softly in a corner,
and the door open, for those who came to find.

Kenneth Steven

When the world was dark

When the world was dark - you came.
You crept in beside us.

And no-one knew.
Only the few who dared to believe that God might do
something different.

Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?

Will you come into the darkness of today's world,
the fearful darkness in which people have stopped believing
that war will end,
or that food will come
or that a government will change
or that the church cares?

Will you come into that darkness and do something different
to save your people from death and despair?



Will you come into the darkness of an individual's pain and loneliness,
the fearful darkness when the phone has not rung,
the letter has not come,
the friendly voice no longer speaks
and the doctor's face says it all?

Will you come into that darkness and do something different
to embrace your people?

Will you come into the dark corners of our lives if we open
ourselves to you?

When the world was dark - you came, you crept in beside us.
Do the same this Christmas, Lord.
Do the same this Christmas. Amen.

Wild Goose Publications - Cloth for the cradle

Merry Christmas

At the heart of Christmas there was
Pain, bleeding and crying;
Love was with difficulty brought to birth.
Not to a sanitised stable did God come,
But to a world, that needed mucking out;
His birth no tidy affair, but through
A single parent, in bed and breakfast
Shelter; an inconvenience, not welcomed
By bureaucrats with important business;
Acknowledged mainly by low-paid
workers,
Foreign visitors, and animals.
The sequel: attempted murder, exile.

Pain, bleeding and crying,
A sword piercing the heart of God,
Opening the wounds of love.

Could we be midwives for the love of
God,
Cradling that strength born in
fragility,
Delivering healing to the crying world?

Ann Lewin

People wounded by indifference
struggle to give love birth in the
Cold comfort of charity, largely
Unrecognised by those with power.
At the heart of Christmas, still there's

A Christmas Song

Why is the baby crying
On this, his special day,
When we have brought him lovely gifts
and laid them in the hay?

He's crying for the people
Who greet this day with dread
Because someone dear to them
Is far away or dead,

For all the men and women
Whose love affairs went wrong,
Who try their best at merriment
When Christmas comes along.

For separated parents
Whose turn it is to grieve
While children hang their stockings up
Elsewhere on Christmas Eve,

For everyone whose burden,
Carried through the year,
Is heavier at Christmastime,
The season of good cheer.

That's why the baby's crying
There in the cattle stall:
He's crying for those people.
He's crying for them all.

Wendy Cope





<https://youtu.be/Zl0dY5gYutw>
Universal Child – Annie Lennox

Annie wrote this song after singing with the African Children's Choir. She sees them as ambassadors of a continent that has suffered and is still suffering.

How many mountains must you face
Before you learn to climb?
I'm gonna give you what it takes
My universal child

I'm gonna try to find a way
to keep you safe from harm.
I'm gonna build a special place
A shelter from the storm
And I can see you
You're everywhere
Your portrait fills the sky
I'm gonna wrap my arms around you
My universal child

And when I look into your eyes
So innocent and pure
I see the shadows of the things
That you've had to endure
I see the tracks of every tear that

ran right down your face
I see the hurt, I see the pain
I see the human race

And I can feel you
You're everywhere shining like the
sun.
And I wish to God that kids like
you could be like everyone.

How many tumbles must it take
Before you learn to fly
I'm gonna help you spread your
wings
My universal child

I'm gonna help you find a way to
keep you safe from harm.
We're gonna build a special place
A shelter from the storm

I can feel you
You're
everywhere
Shining like the
sun
And I wish to God
That kids like you
could be like
everyone

from 'The Three Faces of Christ'

What you must first understand about the face
of Jesus

is that it is so small.

He has no hair yet.

His milk teeth are not yet showing beneath his
gums.

His lungs are well developed,
as Mary and Joseph and the animals have already
discovered.

But he has no language beyond his crying.

He, the Word of God,
cannot say 'Mamma'.
He, the Son of God,
cannot call him 'Abba',

let alone argue with rabbis and priests in the
Temple

the finer things of heaven.

He is the Love of God,
and yet he cannot smile

(although sometimes, when he gets the wind,
his face crumples up as though he can).

His eyes cannot focus,

and yet, and yet,

if you kneel beside his manger

(you will be far too high above him if you stand),

if you kneel so that your face is close to his,

then you will find yourself

looking level-eyed into the face of God.

Trevor Dennis



<https://youtu.be/7KvrbYZB2vY>

O Magnum Mysterium (O great mystery) Marten Lauridsen



The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:5