

St Simon and St Jude, Earl Shilton and St Mary's, Elmesthorpe.

The Twelve Days of Christmas

In the Church Calendar the season of Christmas lasts for twelve days from 25th December until the eve of Epiphany on January 5th.

While many of our Christmas services are held in the run up to Christmas Day, during the twelve days of Christmas, we can still reflect with amazement on the mystery of Christ's 'incarnation' - God becoming a human being and dwelling among us.

Here are short reflections for each day of Christmas which you may like to use.

25th December - Christmas Day

Take some time to look at this image – what response does it evoke in you?



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. Amen.

26th December – St Stephen's Day

Stephen was the first Christian Martyr recorded in the Bible (see Acts chapter 7). The charity Open Doors supports Christians who are persecuted around the world. In 2023, in different parts of the world 14,766 churches and Christian buildings were attacked, and 4,998 Christians murdered for their faith. In North Korea 100,000 Christians are supported through underground networks.

Dear God, at Christmas we remember Your extraordinary humility and grace in coming to earth as a baby – and as our Saviour Jesus. Please draw close to our persecuted sisters and brothers around the world who suffer because they follow You. May they know Your peace, joy and tender loving care this Christmas. Amen

27th December – St John the Evangelist Day

Of all the writers in the Bible, John, who was one of Jesus' closest disciples, grasped the depth of God's love for humanity. He wrote 'God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his son into the world so that we might live through him' (1 John 4 v 9). John also wrote about Jesus that 'What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people' (John 1 v 3-4).

Light a candle and re-read these verses written by John.



28th December – Holy Innocent's Day

Today we remember the plot by King Herod to murder Jesus (see Matthew chapter 2 v 13-23). This resulted in the murder of all children under two years old in and around Bethlehem. Mary, Joseph and Jesus fled to Egypt to escape this murderous plot.

Pray for all those who are facing persecution and for refugees who, like our Saviour, have had to flee from their homes or their country. Pray for their care and protection.

*Heavenly Father, whose children suffered at the hands of Herod,
though they had done no wrong:
by the suffering of your Son and by the innocence of our lives
frustrate all evil designs and establish your reign of justice and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.*

29th December

Praise God using the words of this hymn by Charles Wesley:

Hark! The herald angels sing: 'Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies,
With the angelic host proclaim, 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'
Hark! The herald angels sing: 'Glory to the new-born King!



30th December

Contemplate this picture and these words:



*Silent night, Holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.*

31st December

In Luke 2 v 16-20 we read that all were amazed when they heard the Shepherd's story 'but Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart' (v19).

Mary had gone through a turbulent time. Perhaps this year has been difficult for you too. Where, over the past year have you seen God's goodness and grace, amid difficulty? Like Mary, ponder these things, and give thanks to God for them.

31st Dec continued overleaf....

Light a candle and say this prayer:

Lord God, at the end of another year, I thank you for the times when I have recognised your goodness and your grace. Continue to give me hope as I put my trust in you for the year ahead, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1st January – The Naming and Circumcision of Christ

When Jesus was eight days old, he was named and circumcised according to the Jewish tradition into which he was born. Give thanks to God for the people and traditions that have shaped your faith. Use the poem below to renew your commitment to serve Christ during the coming year.

Ring out the old,
ring in the new
last year has gone – let it go!
Ring out what's false,
ring in what's true.

Ring out all want,
all wars and sin,
the faithless coldness of our times.
Ring out the darkness of the land,
ring in the Christ that is to be!

(After Tennyson – In Memoriam CVI)

Ring out false pride,
all hate and spite,
ring in the love of truth and right
ring in the common good of love.

2nd January

It came upon a midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

For lo!, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. Pray for the peace of the world this year, and especially in the Holy Land.

3rd January

We don't know much about Joseph, but what we do know from Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 1 v 18-25, and 2 v 13-15), is that he was open to God's guidance, prepared to do what was right even at personal cost, and was protective of Mary and Jesus. What can you learn from Joseph that will help you develop good character in the coming year?

3rd Jan continued overleaf....

God our Father,
who from the family of your servant David
raised up Joseph the carpenter
to be the guardian of your incarnate Son
and husband of the Mary:
give us grace to follow his example
of openness and obedience to you
that we, like him, may be courageous and dependable.
In Jesus name we pray. Amen.



4th January



In two days-time (6th January) the Church celebrates the Epiphany, the Christ-child being revealed to wise men from the East who had been guided by God by means of a star (See Matthew 2 v 1-12).

Pray for yourself and your own searching for God, as well as for others who are setting out on a journey of discovery towards Jesus.

Creator of the heavens,
who led the Magi by a star
to worship the Christ-child:
guide and sustain us,
that we may find our journey's end
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

5th January

We read in Matthew 2 v 10 that 'When [the wise men] saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy'. Looking back over the past twelve days of the Christmas season, what insight or discovery about Christ brings you joy?



Use the words of this hymn to inspire your praise and devotion:

O Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness
Bow down before him, His glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore Him; the Lord is His name.