



## CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE PB 2021 | REFLECTION | Sunny Schwarz

The Christmas Story is something we really should hear over and over again. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is born in a manger with not so much as a bed to lie on.

Bethlehem, while normally a quiet little town, at the time of Jesus Birth is completely overcrowded. All the inns are booked out as everyone came to register following the decree of Caesar Augustus.

It reminds me of the Christmas services – pre-pandemic, of course. We have all experienced it – whether it's Christmas Eve or Christmas Day... the churches are packed!

It's this one special service where young and old, fit and fragile, yes even the doubtful and non-believers squeeze together in a pew with the family for an hour in church. It's the time to put aside all these arguments and fights and listen to the Christmas Story, and maybe see a nativity play – again.

Those who come late cannot expect a seat or even a bit of floor space to stand on. Just like Mary and Joseph – who couldn't find a place to stay at all when they eventually arrived in Bethlehem.

But she was clearly pregnant and exhausted! Surely someone would offer a room. Well... if they knew she was pregnant with the Son of God... Surely they would. But for a random person, that is not a given. Not back then in Bethlehem, and not today. Even in a Christmas Service, there are only few who would offer their seat and comfort to somebody else – as that would mean leaving those they came with and maybe standing in the draughty doorway, if they were lucky.

But Christmas is not about being lucky or being there first and keeping your seat, it's about Christ, it's about being Christians at heart and about celebrating the coming to the earth of our Saviour.

It includes giving up our privilege, our seat and our comfort for the sake of our neighbour. It is not an easy task, even for believers.

Against all odds – Mary and Joseph believed. The baby in Mary's womb, he was God's son who would reign eternally. The angel Gabriel had explained that to Mary, as he foretold the birth of Jesus. *"Greetings, you who are highly favoured!"* He said and invoked a promise that had echoed throughout the Old Testament.

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ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY  
ST. LAURENCE IN LANZAROTE

Her Son would be called the Son of the Most High and would reign on the throne of his father David. David, a young shepherd boy that was made ruler over Israel. What a promise! So fragile in the beginning but never to be broken.

Luke doesn't mention it, but in Matthew's Gospel we hear about Joseph's dream in which an angel of the Lord appeared and said, "*Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*" Not an easy situation for Joseph, but he believed and accepted. God promised to make David's name great and the prophet Isaiah affirmed that a shoot would come up from the stem of Jesse, David's father, and from its roots a branch – which was Jesus.

That Promise of old, realized so fully at Jesus' birth, is a promise to us all that his second coming will be fulfilled.

Against all difficulties – Mary and Joseph believed in that promise, they kept going and eventually were offered to rest in a stable.

The humble beginnings of Jesus' life remind us that we are to be humble and thankful for what we have been blessed with by our Creator...

We are all here today, comfortably warm and most probably looking forward to celebrating Christmas with a good meal and in company.

So today, we are the ones on the safe side of the door, leaving the cold and bleak winter at the doorstep. We will have a seat at the table. And we are presented again with the greatest gift in the form of God's promise.

But deep within, we might still struggle with emotions. With broken promises. With loss and sadness and disappointment. Christmas is a very emotional time.

This wonderful Christmas time – for some it is such a challenge.

For most of us, it is at least a time of mixed emotions.

There are those who are close to tears even by thinking about yet another Christmas on their own, with nowhere to go, or not being made welcome by their own families because of ongoing strife and arguments.

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Some still cannot meet in person due to the pandemic or due to illness or made a choice because of personal or work commitments. Some can't afford even the smallest present and do not know how to meet the monthly bills.

And then there's those we love and see no longer - Memories of past Christmas celebrations will remind us of those dear ones we have lost – and tears well up at the sight of that empty chair around the dining table.

That first Noel – it wasn't easy, there also was fear, uncertainty, and discomfort... but most of all, there was faith and hope. There was this one promise that would never be broken. God was and is and stays with us all for eternity.

Therefore, let this promise light up your Christmas.

And let us all do what we can to spread the Spirit of Christmas.

Instead of buying presents – let us be more present.

Instead of wrapping gifts – let us wrap those we love in a hug or thought.

Instead of sending gifts – let us send out peace into all the world and share the light of Christ. The true meaning of Christmas is reflected so poetically pregnant in the story of his birth, - so how can we not be grateful for all that was given to us on that day.

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed – and yet, it was a day of rejoicing, as the baby lying awake on the hay was the Saviour of the world!

In that beautiful carol we ask the Lord to stay beside us, to lead us, and to eventually take us to Heaven to live with him there.

You promised to stay beside us, Lord, as we make our way through this earthly life. When the angel Gabriel came to Mary, he reminded her that *“no word from God would ever fail”*. How good it would be if the same would be true for us.

Glory to God in the Highest, and peace to his people on earth.

Merry Christmas to you all.

AMEN.