

BABY JESUS *A CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE*

Readings are for two separate married couples to read in tandem. Text toggles indentation between readers; the wife of each couple reads first. Service lasts about 50 minutes.

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

GREETING & PRAYER

READING I (MELANCON)

We know what it's like for a baby to be on the way. There's something unique about a couple's first pregnancy. We call it "expecting"; from Day 1 of conception, a baby means "hope."

First, the mother *discovers* she is pregnant. She usually holds that news close for a little while. But when "goes public" with the news, other women in her life proceed to tell her, "I had a feeling you were expecting. I just *knew*."

Yet the earliest inklings of pregnancy are still, at max, nine months from the due date. *Mary's* first pregnancy, however, was foretold thousands of years in advance! Her Baby was the center of all of God's big promises...

His promise that one of the offspring of Eve, the first mother, would come One who would deal the death-blow to God's Enemy and the power of sin...

His promise that through a descendent of Abraham would come blessing for all nations...

His promise that a global king would come from the tribe of Judah...

His promise that the kingly line of David would culminate in an Eternal Ruler...

Each of these promises—and many more prophecies besides—added a new stroke to the emerging portrait of human history's central Figure: God's Anointed, the Christ.

Even *Mary's* discovery that she was carrying this Promised One came, not in the usual ways, but with an angelic message.

He was the most anticipated Baby in history, because there was so much He was to do—so much to reveal of God's heart, so much to accomplish... for *all humanity!*

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL
COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS

READING 2 (SHAY)

Then came the difficult part. Mary had to carry that Promised Child for a full term, just like any other expectant mother. Now, any mother in this room knows that is difficult enough. Mary had her share of morning sickness and discomfort.

But then came Rome's decree. Everyone had to relocate for the census. Now Joseph would have to take his wife on the long trek south to Judea, in the middle of her pregnancy.

We're not sure how long they had been in Bethlehem when Mary went into labor. But we know it wasn't long enough for Joseph and Mary to secure a sustainable living situation.

Under normal circumstances, residents of Bethlehem would have offered the couple a place to stay, in keeping with cultural norms of hospitality. But since Bethlehem was bursting at the seams with other displaced families, there wasn't even enough room for them in the local inn, much less in the private homes of Bethlehem.

Some of you mothers can sympathize with Mary. Even *slight* changes in circumstances are made more difficult when you're pregnant. Imagine moving across the country only to discover you have no place to stay.

And then Mary went into labor. Midwives may have gathered when they heard her telltale cries of pain, but Mary would still have to deliver this Promised Child far from the comforts of her Nazareth home.

Yet God preserved this Child and His mother in childbirth. And that first tiny baby cry that so few heard that night in Bethlehem has echoed down to us through history. After all the prophecies, all the hoping and waiting, the sudden displacement of His human parents, and the trauma of childbirth, God had appeared in the flesh—in the most humble and vulnerable way imaginable. Baby Jesus.

When *He* was born, there was no special incubation bed...

No sturdy cart and crib with sterile sheets and little white onesies...

No supportive nursing staff monitoring the health of mother and child...

The best Joseph and Mary could do for Jesus was to wrap Him in rags and lay Him in a feeding box.

AWAY IN A MANGER

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

O HOLY NIGHT

READING 3 (MELANCON)

All newborns get early visitors. Family members and dear friends want to be the first see those tiny hands, study that new little face, and comment on which parent the child favors in their features.

But Baby Jesus had no family visitors. His family was far from home. Those who visited Him were total strangers—two sets of very different people. Blue-collar boys from the fields and foreign scholars from the East each followed the signs God had sent them: the angel, the Scriptures, and the star.

Everyone who visits a newborn seems to whisper. The baby is usually sleeping! The shepherds may have spoken in hushed tones as they visited the sleeping Child in the manger. The wise men may have spoken softly as they presented their prophetic gifts.

But if they were quiet, it was likely out of deep reverence. The Divine signs revealed with certainty this was no ordinary child. And their visits symbolized that this Jewish Baby—a descendent of David born into poverty—was born for the lowly and the mighty, for the Jew and the Gentile. He was born for all!

ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH

WE THREE KINGS

READING 4 (SHAY)

A couple's first child changes their lives. The family never eats, sleeps, or behaves the same again. Then there's all that gear that has to accompany the family wherever they go—pack-and-play, stroller, blanket, diapers, high chair, booster seats, plastic tableware, and about 87 other tools and trinkets.

But this Baby, Jesus Christ, has affected millions of lives for over two thousand years and counting! No baby's arrival has ever come close to producing that kind of change.

In one way, He was like any other child; he was human.

But in another way, He was the only Child of His kind: God in flesh.

The appearance of this Child revealed so much!

Almighty God is not aloof from His creation; He entered it Himself.

God is not willing to leave mankind to die in our sins; in cosmic humility, He stooped down to raise those sinners heavenward.

No longer must we try and fail to earn our standing with God by our own goodness. Someone has come to keep God's law in our place—perfectly.

But from the start of His life, the Baby Jesus was destined for death. Though He earned by His obedience a righteous standing with God, He took the full wrath of God for our sins. And it killed Him.

Yet though born into our fallen world, in His resurrection He would be the Firstborn of a new creation!

That's where we come in. We are not here tonight merely to tell the story of Jesus' birth. We are here to worship this Child. His birth, His life, His work, has changed us forever.

Through Him alone we have a sure and eternal relationship with the God of Heaven.

This Baby Jesus is our Savior and Lord.

This Christmas, worship Him with gladness!

WHAT CHILD IS THIS
HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING
PASTORAL COMMENTS & PRAYER
SILENT NIGHT



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