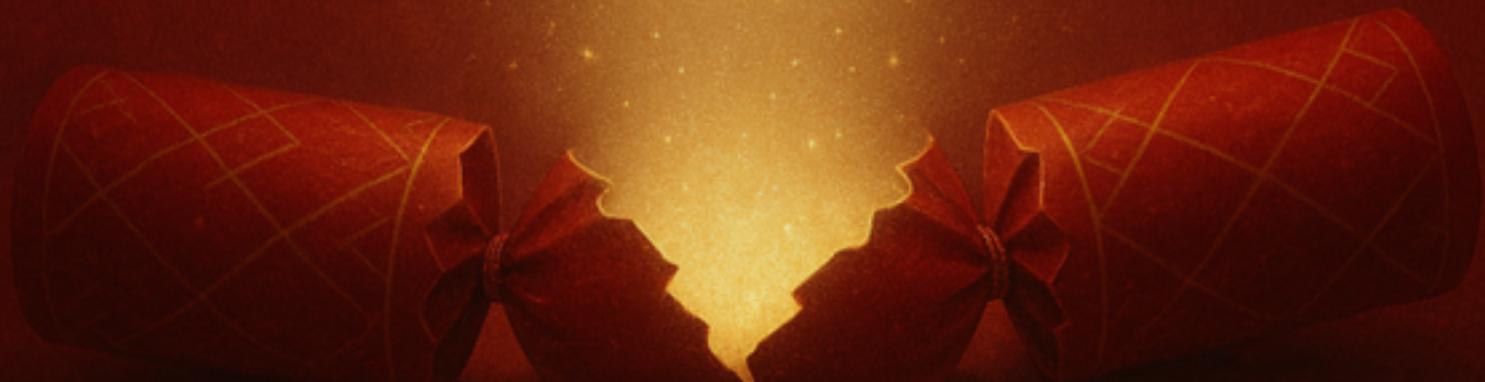


Christmas Is Full Of Surprises

What Are You Looking For This Christmas?

30th November 2025



Salendine Nook Baptist Church

snbch.org.uk/christmas-2025



Welcome

In today's Service we will be looking at: **Isaiah 9 v. 2 - 7**

The theme for our service today is: **Christmas Is Full Of Surprises - What Are You Looking For This Christmas?**

We hope that you will be able to engage with everything that has been produced for today's service and that you would be able to **Know What It Is You Want This Christmas ~ Misery, Falsehood Or Truth!**

Call To Worship

Psalm 62 v. 5 – 8 NLT

I wait quietly before God,
For my hope is in him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
My fortress where I will not be shaken.
My salvation and my honour come from God
Alone.
He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy
Can reach me.
O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him,
For God is our refuge.

Opening Prayer

Loving Lord Jesus, we come to worship you today on this first Sunday in Advent. Today we begin our preparations to celebrate your coming into our world. Be with us now we pray, and help us to know your nearness not only in the time spent here in church but at every time of our lives.

Over many long years your people prepared for your coming; they looked for a king and a conqueror and when you came as a baby they missed seeing you; when you came with the conquering power of love they rejected you.

Let us today heavenly Father, not miss your coming among us now. Be here in our worship and out in the world that we are part of.

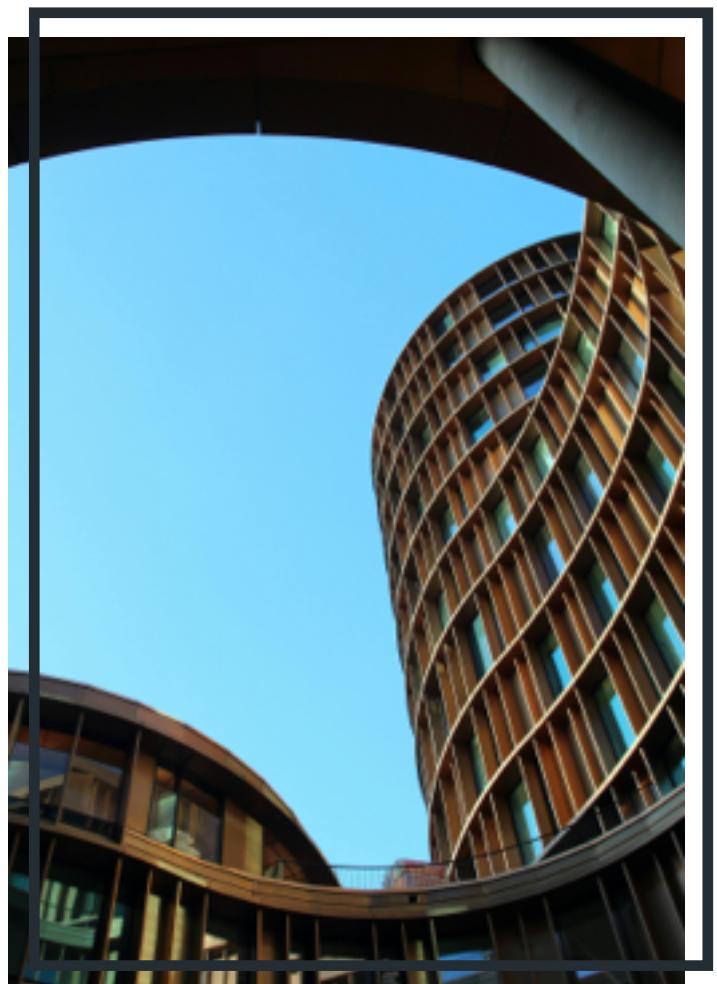
We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen

CHRISTMAS
begins with
Christ

Song Suggestion

At The Name Of Jesus Every
Knee Shall Bow



Bible Reading

Isaiah 9 v. 2 – 7 NIV

2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. 4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. 5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.



Hope

The First Sunday of Advent

A PRAYER FOR THE First Sunday of Advent

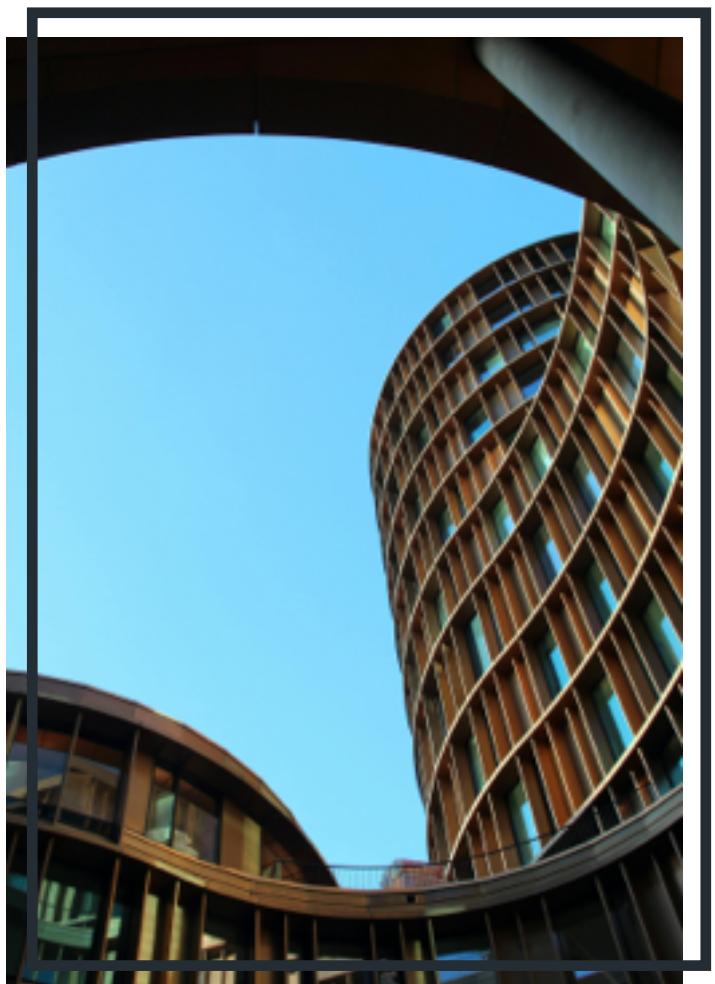
God of light and life,
give us hope as we wait
for your coming again.

When we are tempted
to be grateful to have found you
while others are lost,
send us out into the darkness
in search of those
who need you most.

Amen.

Song Suggestion

As The Deer Pants For The Water



Church Together Thought

Every child wakes early for Christmas. There are many traditions that people are accustomed to, such as turkey for Christmas Dinner. For others there is the tradition of going to Church on Christmas Day! Different countries have different traditions, but some are not as we might wish.

In Australia, someone once said: 'We would open presents and then have lunch. Usually some kind of roast. Not turkey, of course. No - one chooses turkey unless compelled by centuries of peculiar tradition. So, for lunch we would have lamb, or beef, or seafood, or a barbecue, or anything but turkey. We would pull our crackers, don our paper crowns, tell terrible jokes, and eat till we burst. Then burst we did, outside for a swim, before hours of backyard cricket and finally a classic Australian carol, that has nothing to do with what Christmas should be all about'. In Australia, Christmas happens during the summer months, not like us in Britain when we find ourselves in the depth of Winter. And you know what? Blazing sunshine is not the right context for Christmas. Proper Christmas happens; we are told in the Carol - 'in the bleak midwinter'.

Someone said: 'I'm genuinely convinced on this one: Christmas is a winter celebration. I don't really mean the weather. I do mean the mood. Whatever the hemisphere, whatever the climate, there is something inescapably

wintry about Christmas.

Throughout the message this morning we're going to explore a famous Christmas reading – it gets wheeled out at all the traditional carols services, it is sung (twice!) during Handel's Messiah, and it predicts the birth of Jesus 700 years ahead of time. Here's the place of Christmas according to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. **Isaiah 9 v. 2** tells us: 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned'.

Christmas begins in darkness. Isaiah mentions it twice in one sentence – the second time he calls it 'deep' darkness. Yes, a light dawns but, as we'll see, it comes from out of this world. Darkness is the context. The rest of the Bible agrees. If you listen in on a carol service, you'll hear repeated references to darkness. The popular Bible readings are full of darkness imagery. In the original telling of the story, Christmas happens with people huddling together in the gloom. It's not about reflecting the brightness of our sunny circumstances. Christmas, according to the Bible, belongs in a land of deep shadow. That's important to remember at Christmas, especially because it can be such a difficult time. If you're ill, unemployed, broke, single, divorced, depressed or in any other way transgressing Christmas can be rough. For many, Christmas is anything but the most wonderful time of the year. Every relational fracture is exacerbated, every family breakdown is exposed, and every pang of bereavement is given fresh oxygen. Half a million UK families will have an empty chair at Christmas lunch because they've lost someone this year. Christmas doesn't seem to help at these times but only to hurt. If you

are finding Christmas particularly hard, Isaiah assures you: you're not alone. The true context for Christmas is darkness. But what do we do about it?

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR THIS CHRISTMAS?

Have you ever thought about what type of Christmas you are looking for this year. There are different kinds of responses to that question. So, let's look at some of the responses that we could make in response to what the Prophet Isaiah mentions about: 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned'.

We need to be asking some big questions as we think this through: what is the world really like? Where are we headed? And how should we live in response? The type of Christmas you maybe are looking for can be seen in the following characters and as we go through them, I'd love you to be thinking: which am I? Which do I want to be? And what is the best approach that I can take to the darkness described by the Prophet Isaiah.



Is Your Christmas Going To Be Like That Of Ebenezer Scrooge

Charles Dickens describes Ebenezer Scrooge as 'a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint... secret, and self - contained, and solitary as an oyster'. He does business from a Cornhill warehouse and is known among the merchants of the Royal Exchange as a man of good credit. Despite having considerable personal wealth, he underpays his clerk Bob Cratchit and hounds his debtors relentlessly while living cheaply and joylessly in the chambers of his deceased business partner, Jacob Marley. Most of all, he detests Christmas, which he associates with reckless spending. When two men approach him on Christmas Eve for a donation to charity, he sneers that the poor should avail themselves of the treadmill or the workhouses, or else die to reduce the surplus population. He also refuses his nephew Fred's invitation to Christmas dinner and denounces him as a fool for celebrating Christmas. He even frightens a young carol singer by gripping a ruler with a fit of energy. Scrooge resents giving Cratchit Christmas Day off, as

there will be no business for Scrooge during the day. Ebenezer Scrooge had a ruthlessly consistent approach to the darkness. He looked out on a bleak world, looked ahead to a bleak future, and lived accordingly. One of Scrooge's more famous quotes says: 'Every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart'. Dickens depicts a man thoroughly adapted to the dark.

Here is one way of handling the darkness: make your home in it. Become just as bitter as your bitter circumstances and say, as Scrooge did: 'Bah! Humbug' to Christmas'. That's an approach to Christmas, and it's an approach to life. Do you know Scrooges? Are you a Scrooge? Is your Christmas going to be a little bit like that of Ebenezer Scrooge?

If we're honest, the darkness is not just 'out there', in our wintry circumstances. It's also 'in here', in our heart. When life gets hard, we get harder. When things turn gloomy, so do we. And when the lights come on, we are not always that keen to brave the brightness.

What if God is a dazzling source of light and life? This is how the Bible describes Him. And what if He's calling you to draw near? How do you react? Often, our knee - jerk response is to shrink back and hide in the shadows. In the dark we can do what we want. In the gloom we won't be bothered, or shown up, or be held to account. That's why the darkness doesn't just happen to us. We also choose it. As with A Christmas Carol, the best stories begin with a problem. And according to the Bible, this is ours – we're in a pit, groping in the dark. There's an incredible happy ending, but right now we need to face facts.



Is Your Christmas Going To Be Like That Of A Happy Go Lucky Shopper

The Christmas Shopper wears the gaudiest seasonal knitwear, the novelty reindeer socks and the mistletoe headband. The Shopper is not religious – they've given up on Jesus and church, along with Father Christmas and fairy stories. Without such beliefs they figure that this life is all there is, so they try to make the most of it. Their motto is: 'Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die'. They spend big, wrap up warm and live it up while they can. The prophet Isaiah – whose words we looked at earlier in the service – goes on to speak of the future that the Christmas Child will bring. Here's what Isaiah is looking forward to at the end of all things, as we see in Isaiah 9 v. 3: 'You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder'. Isaiah looks forward to the future that includes an incredible hope, liberation and world peace. We see this in **Isaiah 9 v. 4 – 5** which says: 'For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have

shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire'.

Right now, we live amidst darkness, defeat, burdens, and battle. Right now, we suffer through war and bloodshed. If you're a Shopper, you don't believe in the happily – ever – after. Essentially a Happy Go Lucky Shopper has the same view of the future as Scrooge. Without a belief in God or anything beyond death, the Shopper's life is all about blazing brightly now because the grave awaits. And when the big day is over, when the batteries have died, the tree has withered and the credit card bills hit the doormat, the valley of the shadow remains.



Tithes, Gifts & Offerings

If you feel that you are able to, then please keep on giving to the work of the church here at Salendine Nook, with a generous and cheerful heart, praising God for all that he has given to you and share in the finances of the church.



Is Your Christmas Going To Be Like That Of Those Who Gathered At The Stable

Here's what really is concerning today: many people think that God is like a Santa in the sky, a childish fairytale, or a distant moralist. Perhaps that's how you think of Christianity – that it's basically about fleeing the darkness and buying any old myth so long as it's comforting.

Perhaps you think God is a distant dispenser of blessings and curses – 'making a list and checking it twice'.

But Christians don't believe in a Santa in the sky. If that's who God is, then we are better off not believing! Who can be bothered with an invisible benefactor far away? Who can believe by screwing their eyes shut to the darkness and hoping against hope? When Christians talk about God, they are not talking about wish – fulfilment. They are not talking about a light they hope exists beyond the darkness. Christians are talking about a Light that showed up in the darkness.

Isaiah finishes his famous Christmas passage by talking

about the promised Light. It turns out that the Light is a Person. We read about this in Isaiah 9 v. 6 which tells us: 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'.

For Isaiah the Light is not a concept or a fairy story. The Light is a royal Child born into our darkness. This is the ultimate assurance of Light, not a vague belief or a groundless myth. Here is a happening in history. It's a happening that made history, resetting the calendar to the year zero. The coming of Jesus birthed civilisations, literature, art, philosophy, and science. This is nothing like Scrooge, A Shopper or Santa. And it's nothing like humanity's attempts to imagine God. Here is a Light from beyond who shows up personally in our midst. He can be investigated, and billions of people of different cultures, races and ages have been persuaded that He is trustworthy.

When we look at the stable in Bethlehem, it's 700 years after Isaiah wrote his words and yet all his words are coming true. In **Luke 2 v. 7** we read: 'and she [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them'. The scene feels so domestic, but in fact, it is the most astonishing revolution imaginable. Think of the heights and the depths contained in this stable. The firstborn son is of course Jesus. He is the one Isaiah called: 'a great light ... Mighty God ... Prince of Peace'! But what happens at this first Christmas? God participates in human birth! He is born into humanity to become one like us. Born to Mary – an unmarried, dirt –

poor teenager. Born into a suffering, dominated people. Born, we suppose, into a stable – a cattle shed. Laid in a manger – a feeding trough. And, if Isaiah's predictions have been correct, He's born to die – born to descend into the depths of our sinfulness. The traditional Christmas is utterly revolutionary. The King of heaven becomes powerless. The Light of the world descends to the darkness. The giver of life is born to die. This is God's solution to the darkness. We might have responses to the world's brokenness, but Christmas is God's answer.

The Christmas Child is God's eternal Son joining our race by the power of the Holy Spirit as we are told in **Luke 1v.**

35. This means He's not just a special baby; He's an eternal member of that divine family – the Trinity. For this reason, Isaiah (and others) can call Him the 'Mighty God'. He has always been in on that family of love – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But He didn't just bathe in that eternal light. In the stable He entered our darkness because this is what love does.

Jesus did not merely pay us a visit in the stable. God the Son joined Himself to our family in all its poverty and He pledged His life to us forevermore. When you see Jesus in the manger, you're seeing a promise – He is committing Himself to our race and to our plight. In the stable the Christmas Child, though speechless, is speaking volumes. Essentially, He's saying: 'I'm here now. I have come to shoulder your burdens, just like Isaiah promised'.

As He grows up, Jesus' burden – bearing nature takes Him all the way to the depths of the cross – all the way to death. Christmas leads to the cross. There Jesus takes on Himself our sins and all the judgement that we deserve. The cross shows just how far Jesus goes to shoulder our

burdens. Love bears the cost, and on the cross Jesus bears the cost for all that separates us – paying off our debts to God in full. He suffers the dark hell which our sins deserve and then bursts through death and into life on Easter Sunday. Now he comes to each of us in this land of deep shadow and says: 'I know your darkness. Let me be your light'.

This is the ultimate Christmas gift. As Isaiah says: 'to us a son is given'. If you call out to Jesus, asking Him into your life, you receive Him as your own Lord and guide through the valley of the shadow of darkness and death. He takes the government of your life on to His shoulders. He fills you with His Spirit so that His Spirit is now your Spirit. He introduces you to His Father so that His Father is now your Father. He promises you His future so that his eternal life is now your eternal life. It's all for free and that gift tag around His ankle is true: it's all **FOR YOU**. So how will you respond? What are you looking for this Christmas? Misery, like Ebenezer Scrooge. Falsehood, like the Happy Go Lucky Shopper or The Truth as you gather around the Stable this Christmas!

If you find yourself answering, 'The Truth', then maybe it's time you told Him so. John's famous Christmas reading says this about Jesus, as recorded in **John 1 v. 10 – 12**: 'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God'.

If you want to respond to God's ultimate Christmas gift, these verses tell you what to do. As you recognise Jesus for who He is, then you receive Him into your life. When you

do so, you gain Jesus as your Lord – He becomes your guide as well as your friend. You also are given His Spirit as your Spirit and His Father as your Father. You become a forgiven child of God forever.

Is this something you want? It will mean receiving a new direction in your life – Christ's. It will also mean entering God's extended family – the church. But this new direction and new community are exactly what you need as you walk with Jesus through the darkness and into the light maybe for the first time this Christmas.

Whatever kind of Christmas you're having, may it be a blessed one. In your darkness, may you know His Light this Christmas. Maybe, just maybe, this Christmas may be full of surprises for you.

Song Suggestion

Joy To The World, The Lord Has
Come!



Prayers Of Intercession

God of Hope be the Good News that we need during this season of Advent. Be with us in our gatherings and in our travelling together, be with us in our worship and in our praying together, be with us as we seek to hear the Good News of Jesus this Advent.

Lord in this season when every heart should be happy and joyful, many are struggling with the heaviness of life, with burdens that steal their joy; we pray that you would bring Good News into their lives. Fill us, we pray, with your light instead of darkness, help us clear the way in our hearts and minds to concentrate on the true meaning of Christ's coming and not on the worldly things, which so often block out our thoughts and worship of you.

Loving Lord, we live in disturbing days across the world; a world filled with doubt and conflict, inequality and injustice. Make this time of waiting throughout this Advent season a time of new awakening of thought, consideration, endeavour and action, by all leaders and all nations, to bring about health, peace, freedom and understanding. May the hope of Jesus be the Good News that they hear.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those we know and love, those who are unwell and those who need comfort and strength. May you be the Good News that they need this day. Lord Jesus, we pray you surround all those who mourn, with your

continuing compassion. In the stillness of these moments we lift them up to you this day.

We pray for our government – all governments and those in authority; help them we pray as they all struggle to seek to do what is right and fair in these difficult times.

We pray for all those in our fellowship who work especially in Education and the Health Service. May they know your loving presence in these days, as they seek to serve others around them.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of hope, who brought love into this world, be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, that brought peace into this world, be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, that brought joy into this world, be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon, be the centre, the focus of our lives

Always, and particularly this Advent time, be Good News to all.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

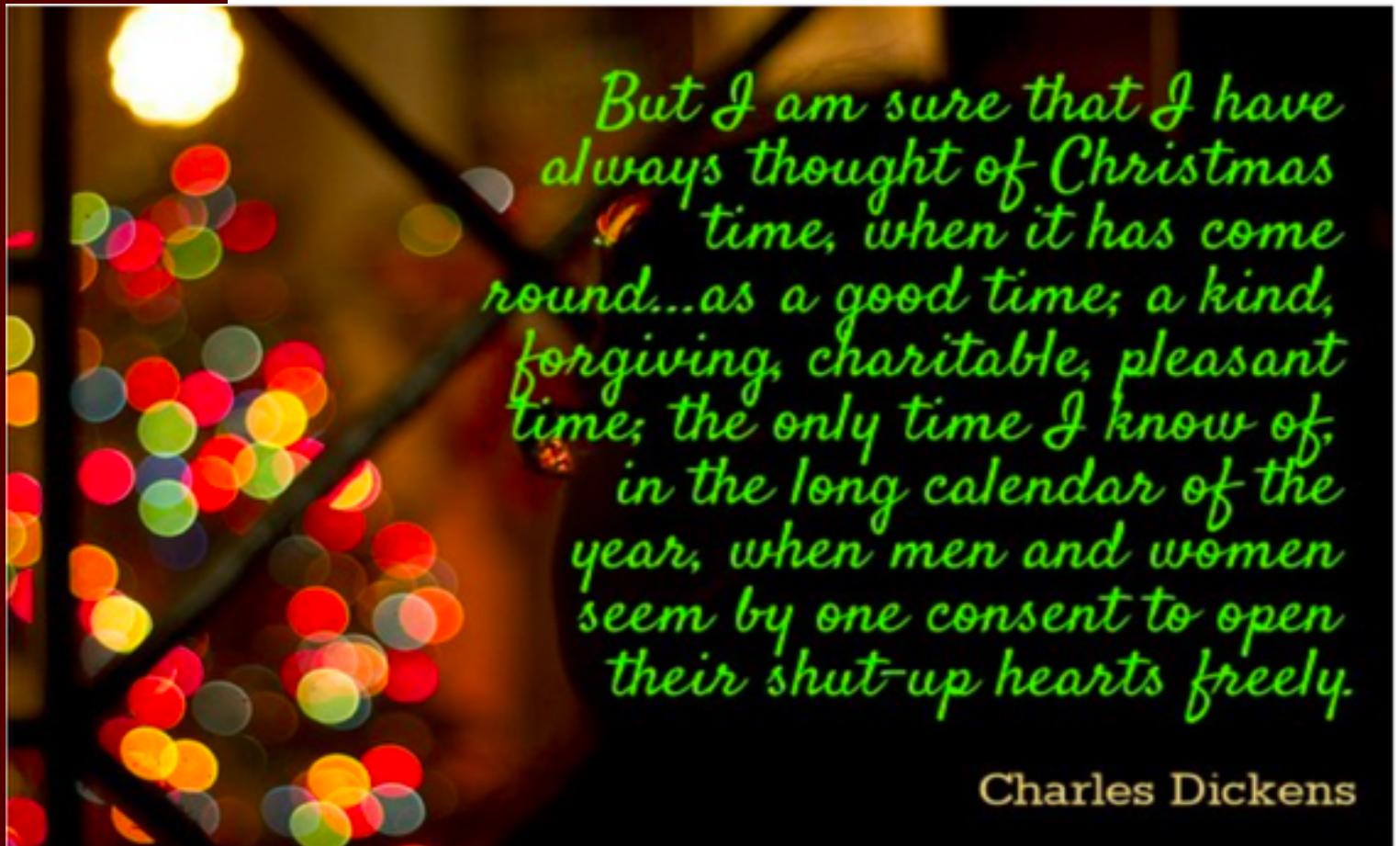
Amen



A CHILD HAS BEEN BORN FOR US,
A SON IS GIVEN TO US;
AUTHORITY RESTS UPON HIM
HE IS NAMED JESUS

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in Heaven
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
And the glory, forever and ever.
Amen

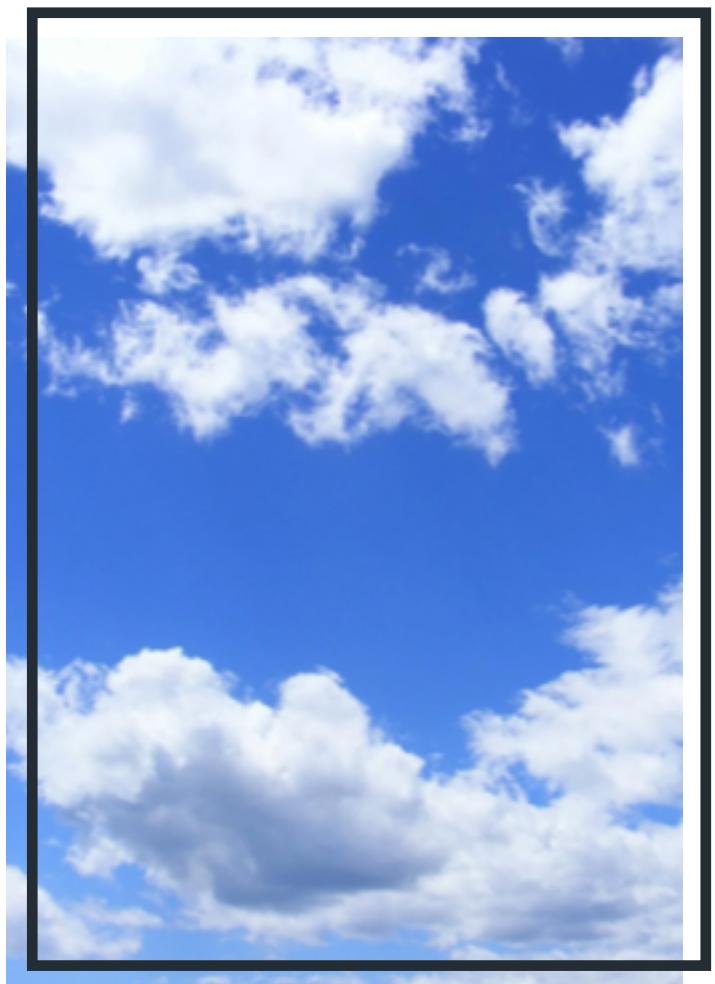


But I am sure that I have
always thought of Christmas
time, when it has come
round...as a good time; a kind,
forgiving, charitable, pleasant
time; the only time I know of,
in the long calendar of the
year, when men and women
seem by one consent to open
their shut-up hearts freely.

Charles Dickens

Music Video

Somewhere In Your Silent Night



Blessing

May the God who gives us peace
Make us holy in every way
And keep our whole being—
Spirit, soul and body—
Free from every fault
At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
Amen