

The Journey To Bethlehem

× Is There Hope For The Shepherds?
12th December 2021



Welcome

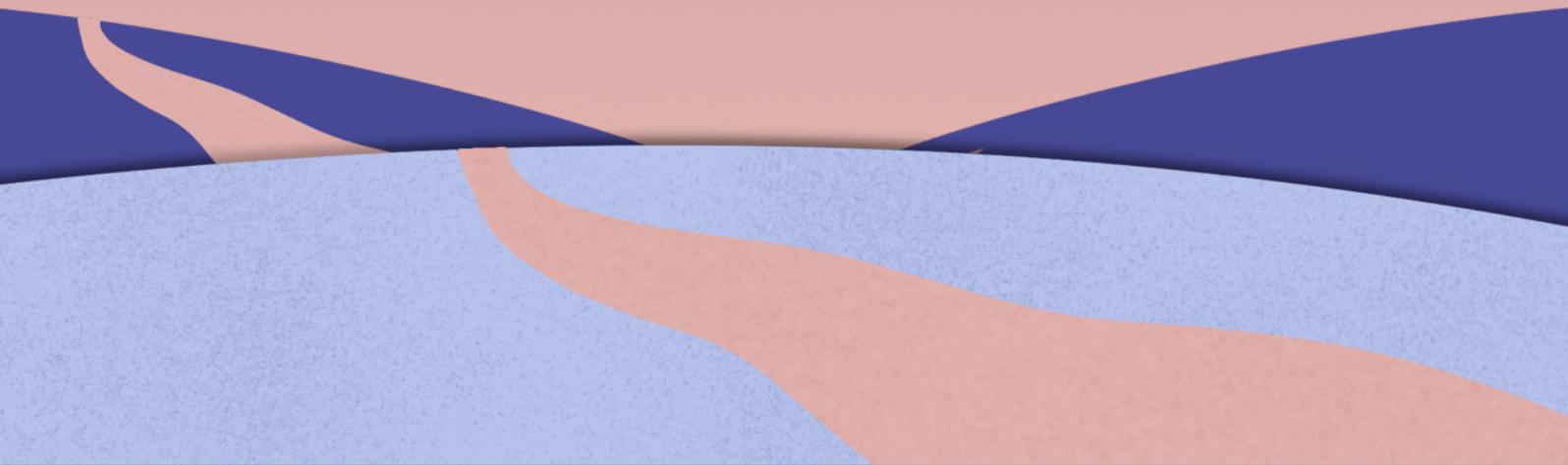
Welcome to **Church Together**.

No matter wherever you are, whatever you do, whoever you are, together we can grow as Church Together.

Our flexible Sunday worship patterns blend together on - line services, home deliveries and emailed copies of Church Together.

Today's service will be looking at: **Luke 2 v. 8 - 20**

The theme for today's service is: **Journey To Bethlehem - Is There Hope For The Shepherds?**





Today's service that is set out in this edition of **Church Together** is looking at **Journey To Bethlehem ~ Is There Hope For The Shepherds?** We hope that you will be able to engage with what has been produced for our **Sunday Service** and that you would indeed **Continue To Journey With Us As We Take A Step Closer To Bethlehem.**

Call To Worship

Psalm 33 v. 1 - 5 NLT

Let the godly sing with joy to the Lord,
for it is fitting to praise him.

Praise the Lord with melodies on the lyre;
make music for him on the ten - stringed
harp.

Sing new songs of praise to him;
play skilfully on the harp and sing with joy.

For the word of the Lord holds true,
and everything he does is worthy of our
trust.

He loves whatever is just and good, and
his unfailing love fills the earth.

Song Suggestion

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel



Opening Prayer

Loving Heavenly Father, as we wait in expectation, help us today to recognise your presence within us, and around us even when we don't see it.

Be with us as your people, in our worship,
joined by your Spirit.

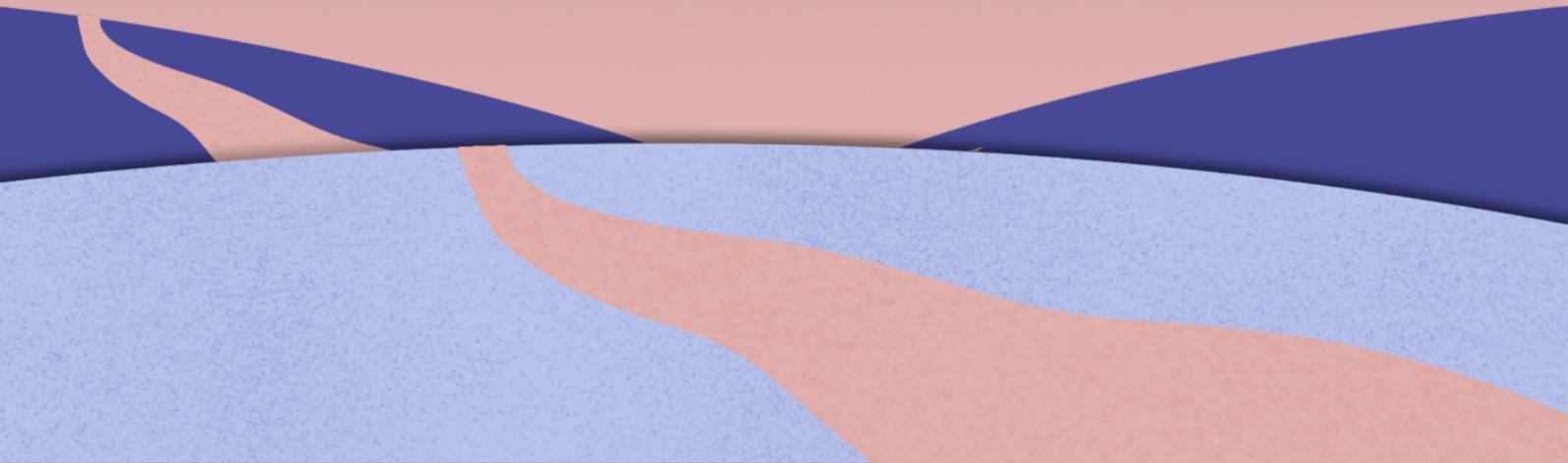
As we focus on you on this third Sunday in Advent, help us to see glimmers of your hope, joy, love and peace, even when we feel as though darkness closes in.

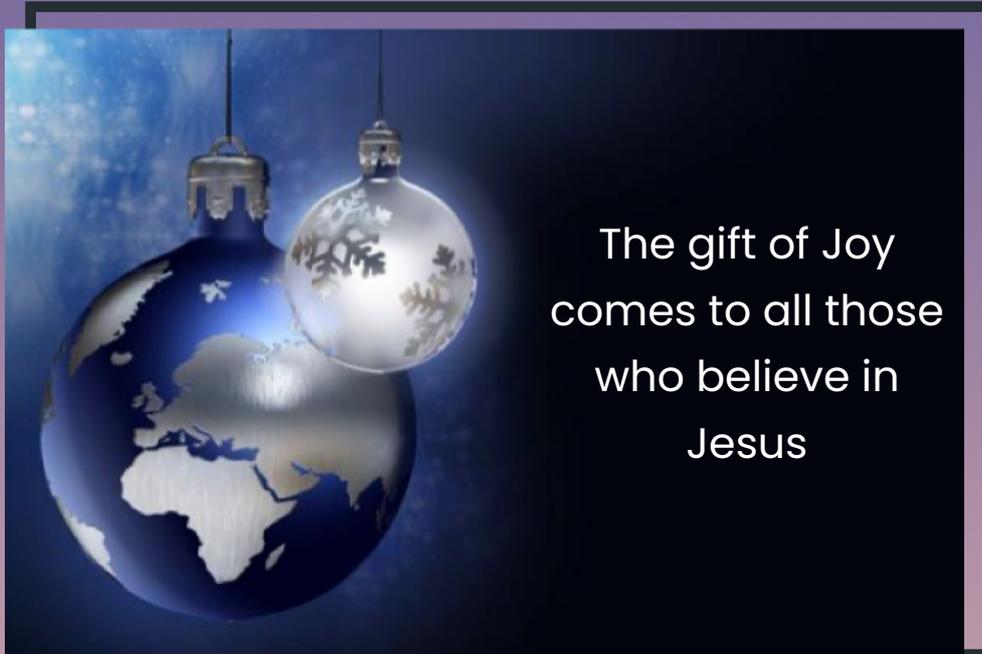
You, our God, are worthy of all our praise,

you, our God are worthy of all our love, you, our God, are worthy of our lives, not because you require it, but because you first loved us.

We praise you that whenever your people have found themselves in despair, you have made yourself known to them, transforming lives and redeeming all. Be with us all as we wait for your coming. For we ask these things in Jesus name.

Amen





The gift of Joy
comes to all those
who believe in
Jesus

A PRAYER FOR THE
Third Sunday of Advent

Joy-filled Giver of Life,
let the anticipation of your birth
fill us with overflowing joy.
May our excitement and anticipation
be a sign to the world
that you are always near.
Amen.



Advent Wreath

Prayer Week 3 –

Joy

On this Third Sunday in Advent, we come and pray:

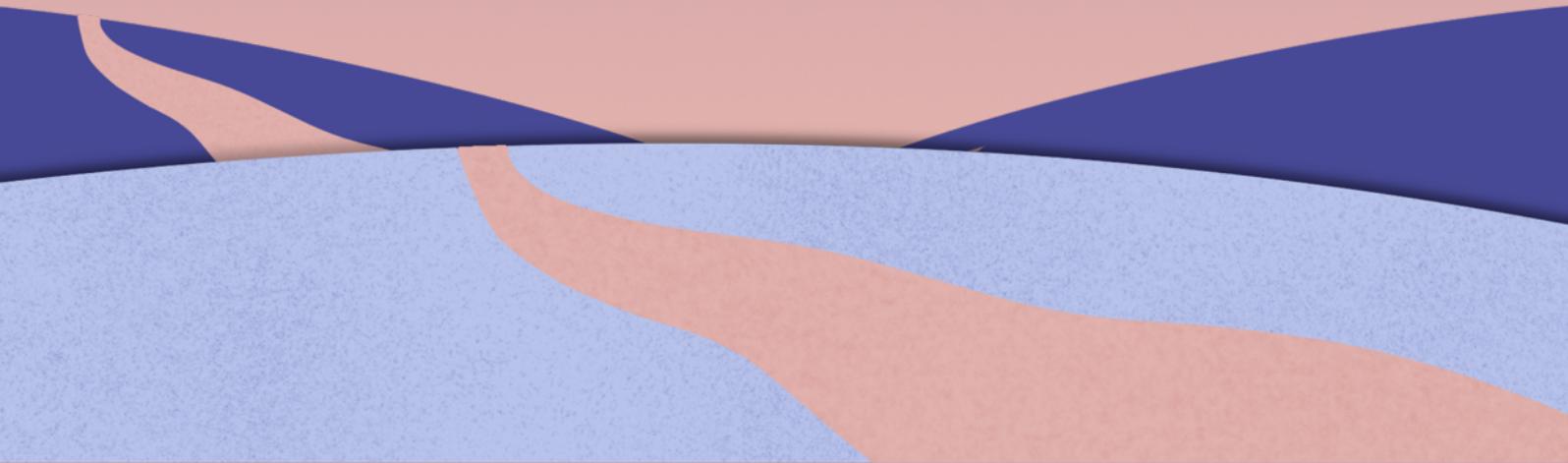
Heavenly Father, This third week of Advent, let us remember that the good news of Jesus' birth has the power to bring us great joy this Christmas season. Our joy isn't dependent on what is going on in our life, in our world, or the people that we are with. It doesn't depend on the gifts we give or the gifts we find under the tree. No earthly thing can ever give us complete joy. Our joy comes from you. That joy that flooded the hearts of the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the hosts of heaven, and Mary and Joseph is the joy that still has the power to overwhelm our hearts with rejoicing. Those who gathered around the new baby were blessed because they believed that you had fulfilled your promises. Mary and Joseph believed and were able to feel the joy of holding baby Jesus in their arms. The shepherds and wise men believed the angles and the signs and experienced the great gladness of worshipping their Messiah.

Those who knew him and recognized him were overjoyed at the coming of Jesus. They saw the prophecies fulfilled and their fear was replaced with happiness as they gazed on the face of the one who would be their Saviour. They trusted in your promises and their hearts were filled with gladness as they watched your loving-kindness manifested in the face of a tiny baby in a lowly manger.

Father God, you offer that same joy to us now if we know you and recognize Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. You gave us a reason to celebrate when you gave us the unspeakable gift of Jesus. You came to dwell among us. You went to Calvary's cross for us. You overcame death and rose from the dead for us. You forgive our sin and give us eternal life when we believe in you.

Our joy doesn't come from our jobs, our family, our relationships, our finances, or our success. Our joy doesn't come from what we have on earth or who we are with. Our joy is a gift. It is the gift that you gave us that first Christmas in Jesus. Our joy is encompassed in our Saviour, King Jesus. Flood our hearts with joy this Advent season as we reflect on the good news of Jesus' birth. In Jesus' precious name we pray.

Amen



Song Suggestion

Rejoice, The Lord Is King!



Welcoming Into Church Membership

On this Third Sunday in Advent we come together to share with Ali, Yvonne and Cheregreta as they enter into Church Membership here at Salendine Nook. We enter into a covenant with all three of them as we seek to build up the Church to the glory of God, working alongside one another in his service in the world, and encouraging one another in the love of God.

As the family of God here at Salendine Nook Baptist Church, we will share together with Ali, Yvonne and Cheregreta in welcoming them into the church family here through both prayer and commitment to them and each other.

All three of them will be asked the following:

Do you believe God has called you to serve Christ as part of this local Baptist Church? Do you commit yourself to love and serve the Lord within this church community and in the world; and being filled with the Holy Spirit, to fulfil your ministry in the Body of Christ?

When each has responded, the Church family at Salendine Nook will be asked:

Do you welcome Ali, Yvonne and Cheregreta into the family of God in this local Church? Do you promise to love, encourage, strengthen, guide, pray for and care for Ali, Yvonne and Cheregreta as an equal partner in the Body of Christ?

On response from the Church family, all three will be offered the right hand of fellowship and the following will be said:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and on behalf of this fellowship, I now warmly welcome you into church membership here at Salendine Nook Baptist Church.

We will then pray for each of them, that God's Holy Spirit would rest and remain with them.

Bible

Reading

Luke 2 v. 8 – 20 NIV

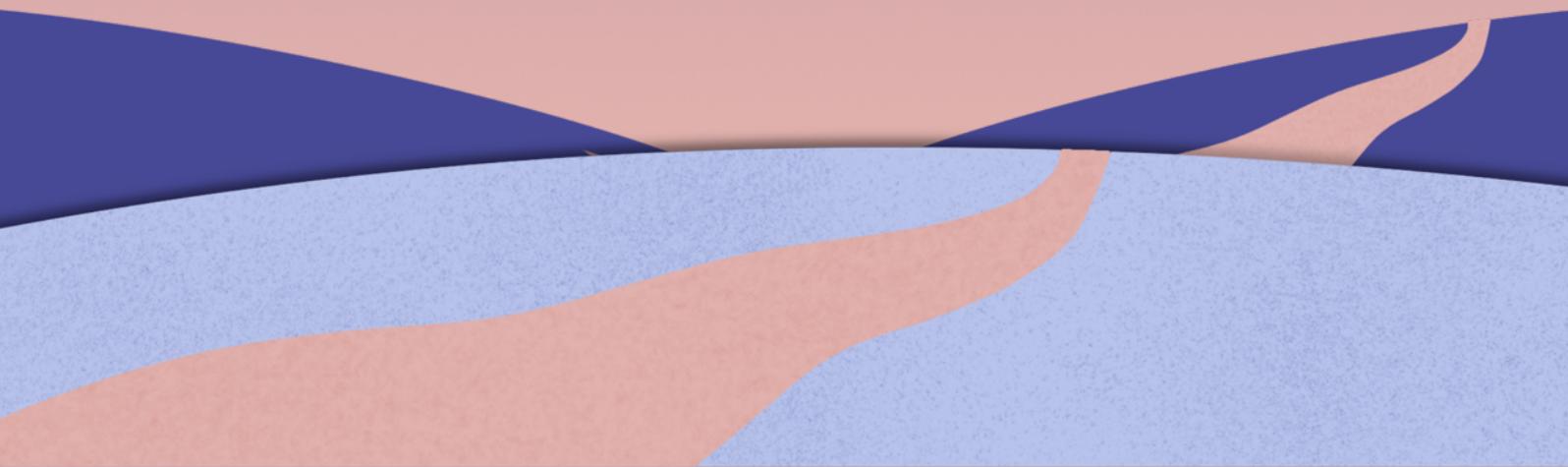
8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.



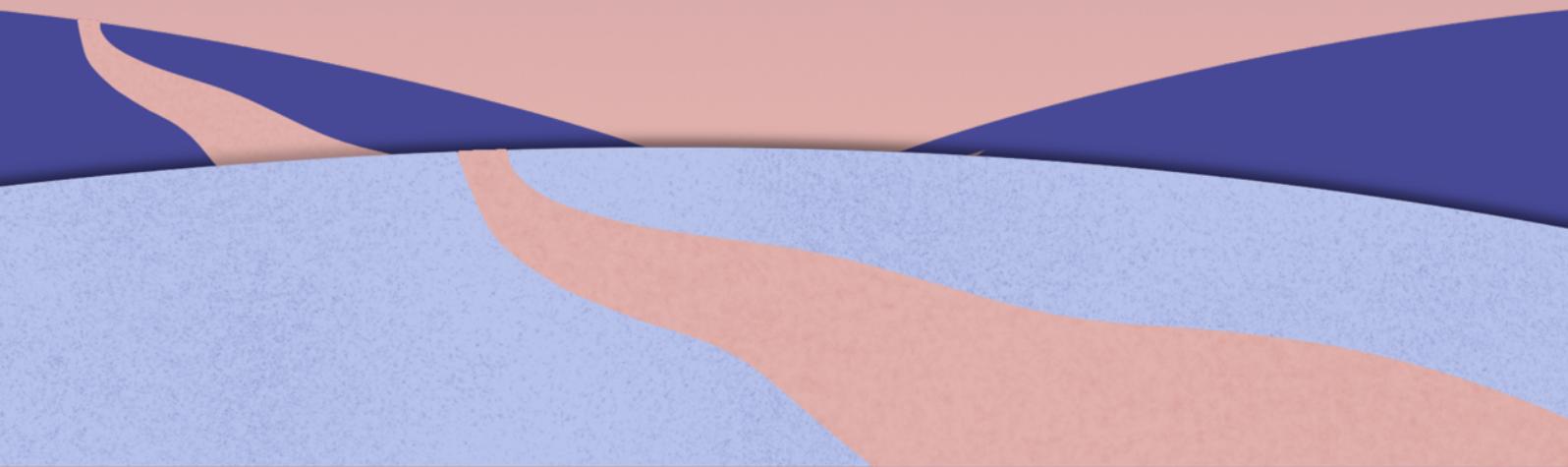
Church Together

Thought

As we continue to Journey to Bethlehem, we come to that part of the journey that involves the shepherds. So, let's set the scene as we look at whether there is Hope for the shepherds?

Because of the Roman decree that each family member return to their home town to participate in a census, Mary and Joseph, have made the trek to the town of Bethlehem. While they were there, it became time for Mary to give birth and there was no guest room available in all of Bethlehem for this young couple. So, they are left to sleep with the animals. And on that night, the King of all Creation is born into the world.

Outside the town at the same time as all of this is happening, a group of shepherds were keeping watch over their sheep. At night, shepherds slept among their flocks. Sometimes they sat and watched, silent figures silhouetted under the night sky and stars. When they slept, it was always with a readiness to respond to any bleating that warned of a nearby predator. When danger did come, a shepherd's grip tightened around his staff, and it became a weapon that would be used to defend himself and the flock in his care. Because there was always the sense of danger, the shepherds were not easily scared.



After all, they were known to take on bears, wolves, and lions on their own. This was a rough and tough group of men. They were not easily startled or scared. In fact, fear probably wasn't even in their own vocabulary.

But on that night in the hills outside of Bethlehem, underneath the stars everything changed for them.

The people of Jesus' day looked for and anticipated the promised Messiah to be one who would be a mighty military leader who would throw off the bonds of their oppressors and re-establish Jerusalem as the capital of their independent nation. Once the kingdom was re-established, the Messiah would rule over the nation and turn the people's hearts back to God. You would expect in all honesty for such a Messiah to arrive and be born in lavish surroundings that would be fit for a King. And when he was born, his arrival would be trumpeted throughout the land with much pomp and circumstance.

But that's not how God wrote the story. He chose a humble young girl and a carpenter from a small, unimportant and disrespected town of Nazareth. And when it came time for the Son of God to be born, His Father in Heaven decided to send His army of angels to announce his birth. But instead of celebrating with the kings and queens and priests and the rich and powerful, He chose to share it first with a lowly, outcast group of shepherds. He chose an unpolished, ragtag group of misfits.

In society's view, the shepherds usually ranked right up there with tanners, sailors, butchers, camel drivers, and other despised occupations. Being away from home at night they were unable to

protect their families, which was also considered quite dishonourable. Because they often grazed their flocks on other people's property, they were also considered by many to be thieves. Their work also kept them away from the Temple for weeks at a time. This was a problem because the nature of their work made them ritually unclean. And they could not go back to the Temple to become ceremonially clean again. The people responsible for raising the very sheep that were used in the Temple worship to roll back people's sins and make them ceremonially clean were effectively unclean because of their occupation.

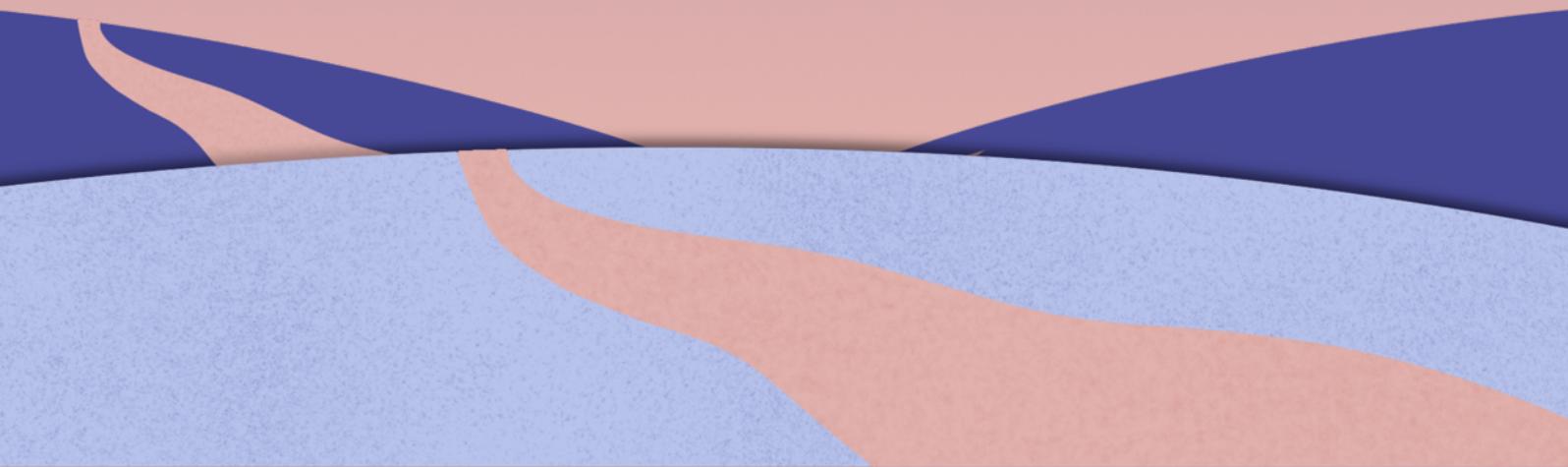
Hope For the Shepherds

And God chose them.

Luke does not tell us much about these shepherds, only that they were watching their sheep and that it was night. Suddenly the darkness is rent asunder by a light more brilliant than any they have ever seen and an angel tells them where they will find their Saviour. The skies are filled with a heavenly choir, and angels sing for joy at the birth of this child ~ Jesus.

Imagine a God who wants to do all this for his people! If I were a shepherd, Ezekiel 34 would be my favourite part of the Scriptures. It is clearly a prophecy foretelling the coming of Christ, and shepherds are the first to be told of the birth of Jesus. They are given this astounding news: a Saviour has been born for them.

Of all the people sleeping nearby on the night when Jesus was born, the heavenly host appeared to a group of men sleeping outdoors with



their animals. The angels could have commissioned any of the philosophers, or religious leaders of the day, but no, instead they appeared to untrained men of the field – not the most likely messengers.

Encounters with the living God inevitably elicit fear. So, the angels had to reassure the shepherds: ‘Don’t be afraid!’ Once the shepherds realized that God wanted to communicate with them, they were free to worship the Christ child. The fact that Jesus came in the flesh reassures us that our holy and almighty God is also a personal God. God is with us and for us. When we put our faith in the living God, his perfect love expels all fear (1 John 4 v. 18).

Good News For God’s People

And that’s great news for us today. God wants to use you right where you are. We don’t have to be super intelligent and have a degree to share the Good News of Jesus with our neighbour. We don’t need to be fluent in ancient Greek and Hebrew in order to share with others what God’s word tells us in Scripture. God just wants to use you right where you are. In our everyday, ordinary, unremarkable lives, God can do something remarkable and extraordinary.

The shepherds had a story of how God’s light burst forth into their lives. And they shared it. The people who heard it were deeply affected by their story. Have you ever wondered how many of them were trained as public speakers? I think it’s safe to assume that not one of them were. They were not the most eloquent bunch, but they simply shared their stories with everyone. And we are told in Luke 2 v. 17, 18 that

everyone who heard them was astonished.

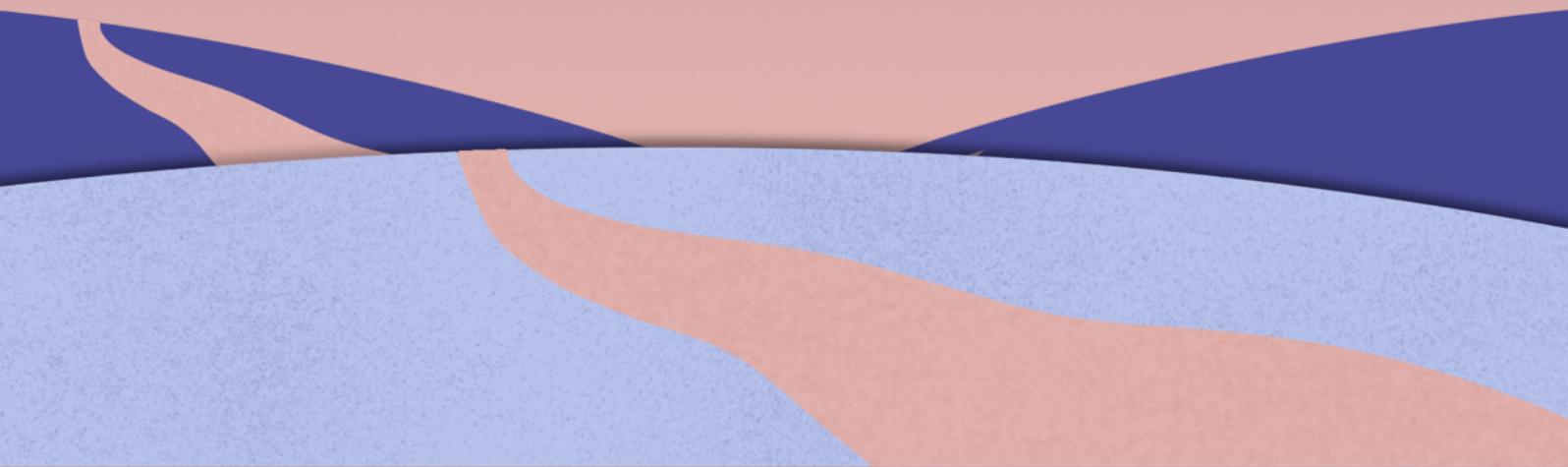
Each one of us has a story of how we began to allow God to take control of our life. It's our story and people are dying to hear it. It would seem that we live in a generation when the more polished, well - trained evangelist might not be the most effective person to switch on the spiritual lightbulbs with those around us.

When it comes to the people you know who are not yet followers of Jesus, YOU are the most qualified person to share the good news with them. Much more important than having all the wording perfectly worked out is the relational interaction you have with them that will enable them to trust you with your intentions. Untrained and unpolished - but utterly genuine - people, simply prepared to gently and respectfully talk about their relationship with God, will best connect with people today.

All we need to do is start telling our stories, just as the shepherds did. God wants to use you: simple, ordinary, unpolished you ... to share His extraordinary and amazing message just like he did with the shepherds.

In preparing to journey with God to Bethlehem, the poor and unimportant, gave their worship to the Christ Child

Where will your journey take you?



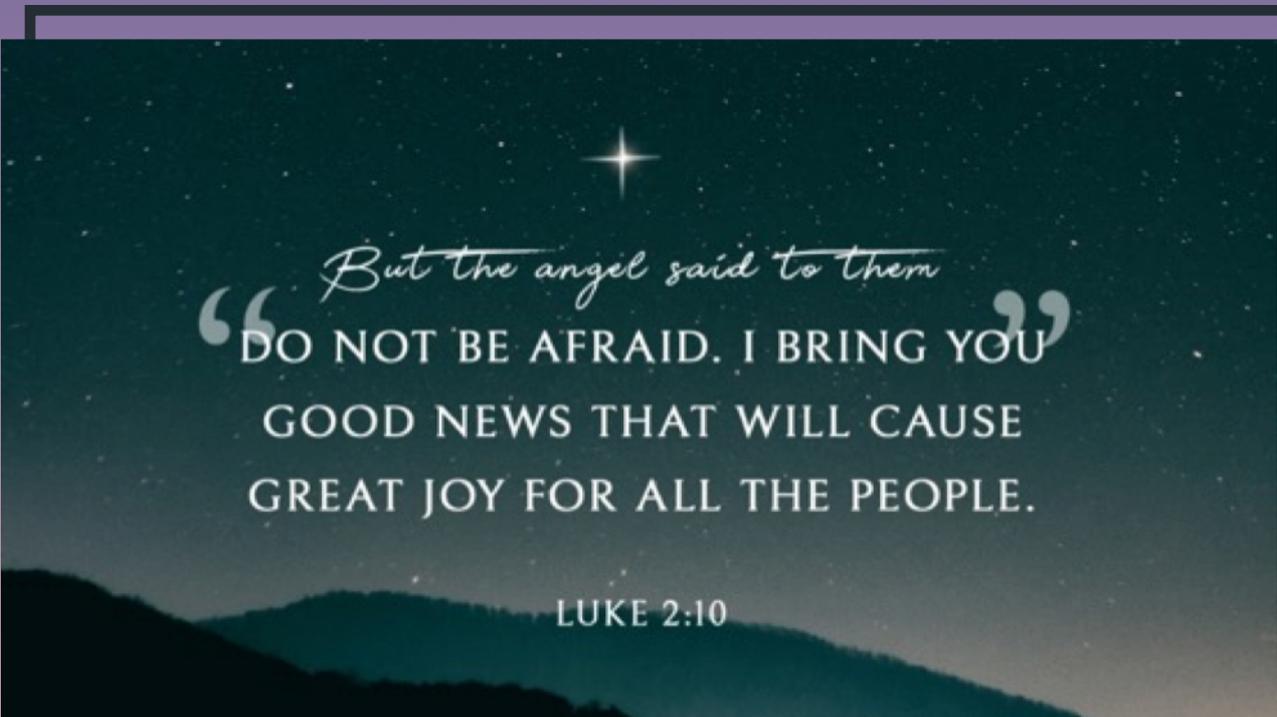
Tithes, Gifts & Offerings



No matter wherever you are, whatever you do, whoever you are, together we can grow as Church Together here at Salendine Nook.

Now that we find ourselves once again holding services in Church, we are able to give of our finances to the work of the Lord when we are in church.

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

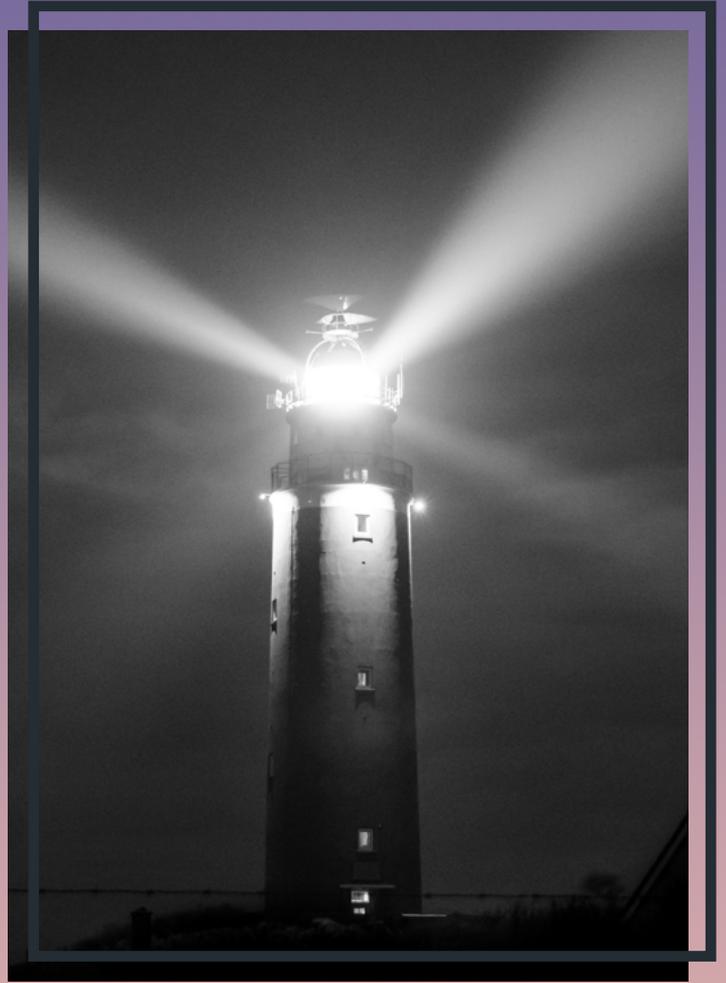


But the angel said to them
“DO NOT BE AFRAID. I BRING YOU
GOOD NEWS THAT WILL CAUSE
GREAT JOY FOR ALL THE PEOPLE.”

LUKE 2:10

Song Suggestion

While Shepherds Wash Their
Flocks By Night



May the God of hope fill you with
all joy and peace as you trust in
him, so that you may overflow with
hope by the power of the Holy
Spirit. - Romans 15:13

Prayers of Intercession

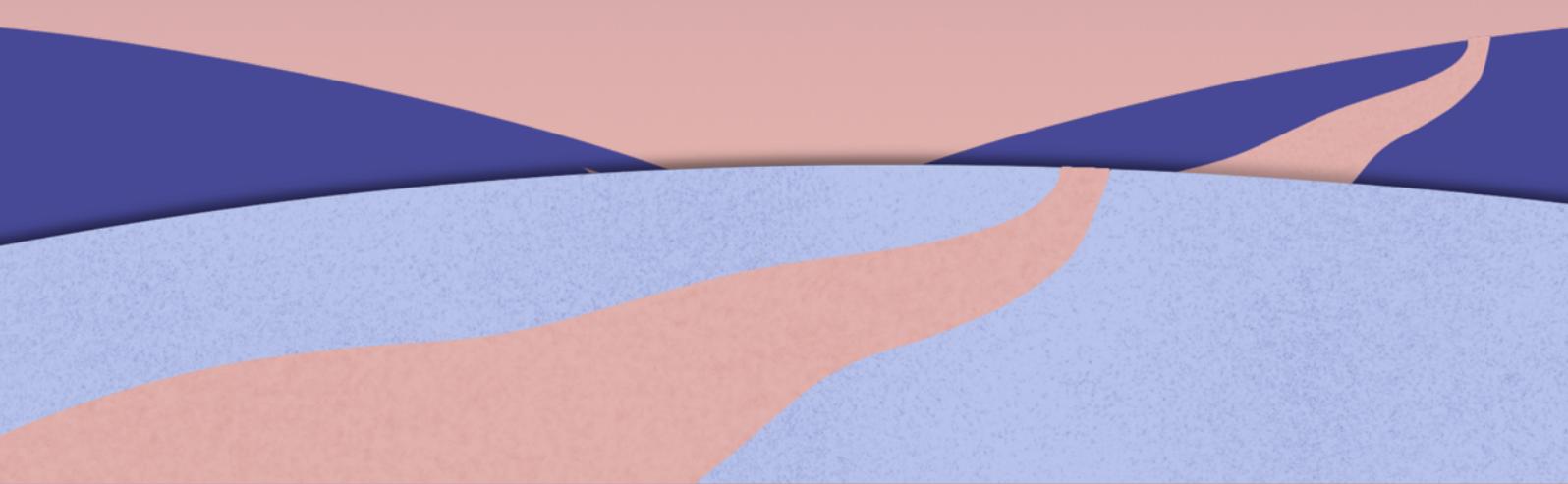
As we come to the Lord in prayer this morning, we pray:

Loving Lord, forgive us for the times we forget, when we lose hope, joy, love and peace. Forgive us when we live by our human anxieties rather than by your Spirit. Forgive us when we narrow your greatness, by setting our own limitations. We thank you that each of us is forgiven and loved, not by our human actions, but because of your immense grace.

Thanks be to God!

God of Love, we pray for the world we live in that seems so dark: a world that suffers with illness and death; a world where the place you were born so often affects so much about the life you are able to live; a world where so many countries put themselves first at the expense of others. God, shine your light into the darkness. God of Love, we pray for people who suffer in darkness: people who are alone and without family; people who have lost loved ones and mourn; people who are ill and have lost hope. God, shine your light into the darkness.

Loving God, hear our prayers.



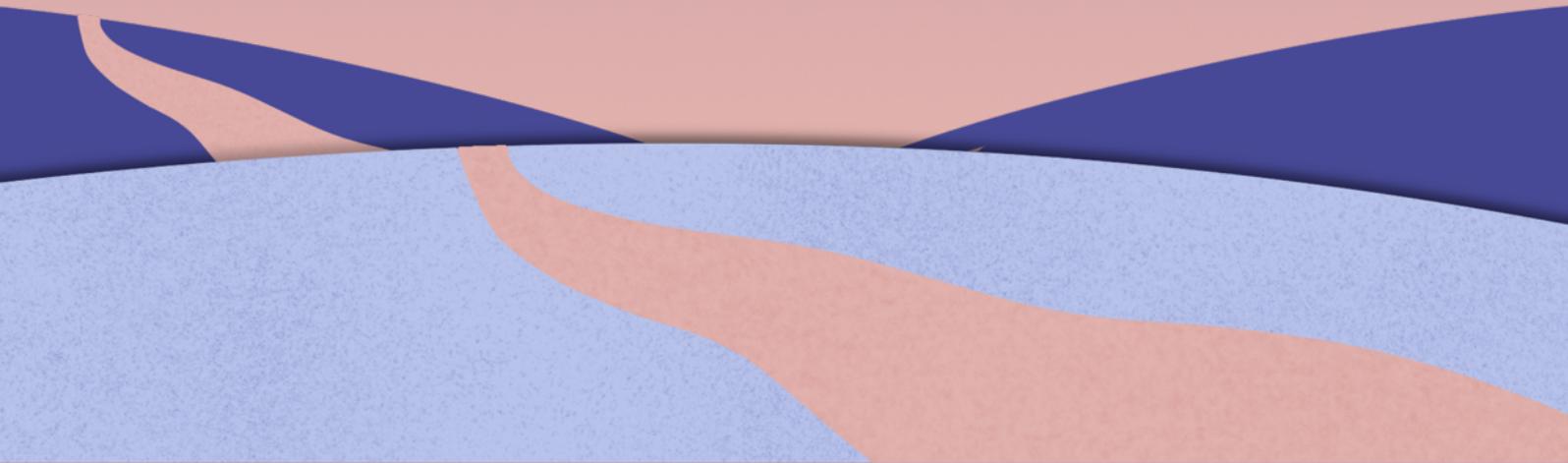
Lord Jesus, on this third Sunday in Advent, would you restore the joy of our salvation? Help us to be willing to follow you with all we have. As we read the Scriptures that remind us who you are and the ways you love us, ignite in us a sense of joy that overflows out of our hearts! Let this holy joy be contagious and spill over into the lives of those around us. May your peace that surpasses all understanding be with us ... especially as we're coming to the close of another year that has felt very scary and uncertain. Encourage our hearts with the knowledge that with you we can live in your perfect peace, no matter our circumstances.

We thank you for the joy and peace you give!

Lord, the good news of Jesus' arrival brings such joy to our world! Reach those who are lost and searching with the message of hope that we have through Jesus. God, allow your message of peace to bring comfort to our anxious lives. As we all go about the holiday season, let the message of great joy pierce through all the noise and into people's hearts.

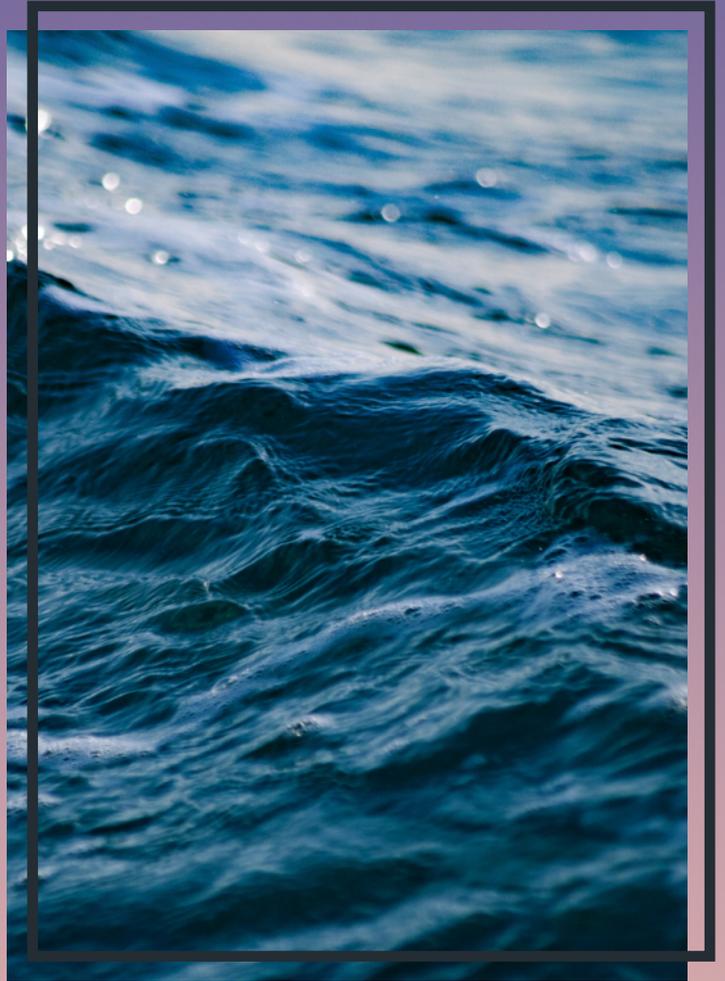
Lord, hear our prayers this day.

Amen



Song Suggestion

Hymn Of Joy (Joyful, Joyful, We
Adore Thee)



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

