

## Call to worship

Leader: In the beginning was the Word. Spoken. Creating the world.

**All: Jesus; you are the Word of God.**

The Word gives life. That life is light.

**Jesus; the darkness cannot put out your light.**

At the beginning of our time: Speak. Shake our worlds.

**Jesus; we're hungry for your words of life.**

We cannot live by food alone,

**We wait on the words that come from the mouth of God.**

The Word became flesh and blood

**and moved in to our neighbourhood.**

It's time for us to put flesh on your word

**That we might be your hands and feet, in our homes, jobs and streets.**

We will worship the Lord and serve him only.

**We will let our light shine in the darkness:**

That the world might see, and be transformed

**And praise our Father in heaven. Amen.**

© Sam Hargreaves/engageworship.org

## Praise

At the start there was a Word, the Word.

This Holy Word was there with God -

**ALL: This Word was God himself.**

The Word was a creative Word - he made everything we now see. Everything.

**There's nothing here that was made without him.**

The Word was a living word,

**shining with the light of life.**

And the light he gives shines in even the darkest places,

**no darkness is deep enough to put it out.**

Once, when the Word decided to become part of the world,  
the world did not see him for who he was.

**He came to his own creation, but it did not accept him.**

But there were some who realised who he was,  
who understood what his name meant.

To these people he was a Word of acceptance,  
**acceptance into the family of God.**

So this Accepting, Shining, Living, Creative, Holy Word became a man,  
and lived among us, Jesus Christ.

**And being in his presence, we have seen that he is glorious -  
full of grace and truth, shining with the glory of the Father. Amen.**

© Kieran Metcalfe/engageworship.org

### **Confession**

Father, when I come to you hungry,

Perhaps it's because I haven't fed properly from your word.

**Word of God, feed me.**

There are times when I lose my way;

I feel like I'm going round in circles, unsure of my next step.

**Word of God, lead me.**

When I'm stuck in repetitive habits,

I know that you have more for me outside of this mediocrity.

**Word of God, shake me.**

Parts of my heart are cold towards the world you love.

Fill me with your compassion.

**Word of God, break me.**

"The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword."

**Feed me with your wisdom,**

**lead me with your love,**

**shake me with your reality,**

**break me with your perspective**

**and rebuild me with your Holy Spirit's power.**

**Amen.**

© Sharon Tedford/engageworship.org

### [John 1:1-18](#)

The Christmas decorations came down earlier in our house this year. The tree was in the place where Debbie had had her home office set up for working

from home during the pandemic, so things had to be put back to normal sooner than usual.

Nevertheless, I still want to wish you Happy Christmas, because we're still in the Christmas season, according to the rhythms of the Church. And of course, I also want to wish you Happy New Year – a happier year than last year, I pray.

Our famous reading from John chapter 1 is known as the Prologue to John's Gospel. Sometimes, when it is read at carol services or in the Christmas season, the reader will introduce it with words such as, 'The mystery of the Incarnation.'

Of course, it's about more than the Incarnation, but for these thoughts I'm going to pick out three themes that John relates here to the Incarnation.

Those themes are light, glory, and grace and truth (which are a pair that go together).

**Firstly, *light*.**

John talks about Jesus as being the light of all (verse 4) and the light in the darkness (verse 5) even before his birth. Then, after John the Baptist witnesses to the light (verses 6-8) Jesus the light comes into the world (verse 9) but he is neither recognised (verse 10) or received (verse 11) except by a few (verse 12), and they become children of God (verses 12-13).

Strange, isn't it? The people that were walking in darkness had seen a great light and yet few recognised and received that light. For Israel, it was the darkness of occupation by Rome. But perhaps they didn't receive the light because it came in a form they didn't recognise or indeed want. They wanted the darkness dealt with in a different way.

We may battle with different forms of darkness, but the danger is the same for us. We have our fixed ideas about what God should do about the darkness and how. When he doesn't deliver, then some people stop believing in him. But of course what they've done is find that their own picture of God is faulty.

For what Jesus shows us about the light is he hasn't come just to banish darkness with a click of his fingers and the flick of a switch, but rather by walking into the depths of darkness and shining his light there. That's what ties together the Incarnation and the Cross. It's what his whole life is about.

I recently read an article entitled '[4 Myths Christians Should Stop Believing About Depression](#)', written by a professional Christian counsellor who has herself suffered from depression. If ever something is an experience of darkness, depression is.

And one of the most telling statements in the piece for me was this sentence:

Depression has nothing to do with lack of faith, in fact, for me—it has been the catalyst for even deeper faith. Because some days, in the hardest moments, faith was the only thing I had.

Do you see? She found Jesus, the light, in her darkness. That's where he was.

In 1983, fifteen years before the Good Friday Agreement, a book was published about Christian reconciliation work in the Troubles in Northern Ireland. It was called '[The Darkness Where God Is](#)'. That's how Jesus is the light in the Incarnation. He comes to be light in the darkness.

So when we encounter darkness, let's look for Jesus there.

### **Secondly, *glory*.**

Just as Jesus brings the light of God in an unexpected way, so also he shows the glory of God in an unforeseen manner. Verse 14:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We see his glory through the fact that 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.'

How would a Roman emperor have shown his glory? In the majesty of his court and the humiliation of his enemies.

How does the Son of God display his glory? Paradoxically, by leaving it all behind in heaven. He comes into a poor family and lives among the poor. 'Emptied himself of all but love,' as Charles Wesley put it.

Or as recorded in Mark's Gospel, Jesus put it this way: 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

That is the glory of God. Putting aside status to live humbly, serve, and give up his life for the salvation of the world.

Those who are impressed by shallow things and shiny trinkets will never see such glory and will miss their way to the kingdom of God. But for those who have eyes to see, this is God's glory, the shining of his splendour.

How might the world see the glory of Jesus today, then? When his people decide that hob-nobbing with the rich and powerful is not the way to go, and choose instead to serve the poor, the last, and the least. As one Internet meme puts it:

Want to put Christ back into Christmas? Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, forgive the guilty, welcome the unwanted, care for the ill, love your enemies, and do unto others as you would have done unto you.

That was what Jesus came to do. That is how his glory was seen. It's really quite straightforward for us to do the same. Isn't it?

**Thirdly** and finally, ***grace and truth***.

We just read that Jesus 'came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (verse 14). John goes on to tell us that in doing so, he brings 'grace in place of grace already given' (verse 16) and that whereas Moses brought the law, Jesus brought grace and truth (verse 17).

In the Old Testament, God is shown to be a God of grace, not least when he saves the Israelites from Egypt and Pharaoh. He then gives Israel his law to keep as a response to that grace and as a sign that they are the People of God. God continues to show grace to his people, even when their sin and rebellion require discipline and punishment. Jesus comes to bring grace on top of all this grace. He brings not only grace, but truth.

So the Incarnation of Jesus says this to us: just when you thought God could not be more gracious, he sends his Son to show grace in person. Now his grace saves us not simply from other people's wickedness but from ourselves, for our sins would have cut us off from God eternally. It's a grace that goes all the way from the manger to the Cross.

John is telling us that Jesus was born into this world on a mission of mercy. It is those who recognise their need of mercy who find fulness of life and a place in his family. Those who consider themselves good, decent, upright, upstanding members of society will never see Jesus for who he is. Only those like the

publican in the Temple staying at a distance praying, 'Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner' understand the Christmas story.

And if we are to live the Christmas story ourselves today, we need to be people who speak about God's grace and who demonstrate God's grace. Who needs to hear about a God of grace and mercy? Who will only understand that if his people today show grace and mercy in their actions?

Can we think of one person who would be set free from their personal prison if they knew about a God of grace?

Can we think of one person to whom we need to show grace and mercy?

**To conclude**, the revelation of Jesus as bringing light, glory, grace and truth at the Incarnation is wonderful, but it is also challenging, because there are implications for us.

The Christmas story encourages us to find the light of Christ in the midst of our darkness.

The Christmas story challenges us to show the glory of Christ not in conquest and arrogance but in humble service.

And the Christmas story calls us to embrace the message of grace for ourselves and spread it by speaking of grace to others and showing grace to those who need it.

The Christmas season may be about to end, but there is no reason for its message to fade away.

### **Song**

(This song was originally for all-age worship, rather than an 'adult' service.)

## Jesus you know what its like

Je - sus you know what its like to be hu - man,  
 Je - sus you know what its like to be lone - ly,  
 Je - sus you know what its like to be temp - ted,

took off your glo - ry, en - tered our sto - ry,  
 ti - red and hun - gry, ex - ci - ted and clum - sy.  
 yet you were faith - ful, lov - ing and grace - filled.

Je - sus you know what its like to be me, so I'll  
 Je - sus you know what its like to be me, so I'll  
 I want to see all those things here in me, so I'll

trust you, com - plete - ly ut - ter - ly.  
 trust you, com - plete - ly ut - ter - ly.  
 trust you, com - plete - ly ut - ter - ly.

Sam Hargreaves  
 © 2004 Sam Hargreaves

### Response

You spoke, Lord, and light penetrated the darkness.  
 A good light. A strong light. A perfect light.  
 But we went astray, loving darkness rather than light,  
 so you sent your prophets, to call us back towards the light.  
 Yet still we were stubborn and afraid,  
 so you sent your son, to be the light of the world.

The light shining in the darkness,  
and the darkness never overcoming it.

You, Lord, are our light and our salvation.

You are our light and our truth.

You are our light and our protector.

You are our light and our fountain of life.

Your light continues to shine,  
in the dark places of our lives,  
in the dark places of our world  
and though things may not be easy, the darkness cannot prevail. **Amen.**

And now you ask us to be your light in the continuing darkness.

At times we may be like a small, fragile, flickering candle,  
at times a bright strong, beam of light...

Help us this coming week to let your light shine through us  
in our words and our actions,  
in our attitudes and relationships.

With our hands, our faces,  
our feet and our smiles.

In the name of Jesus, **Amen.**

© Dave Hopwood/engageworship.org

### **The Blessing for the Christmas Season**

May he, who by his incarnation  
gathered into one things earthly and heavenly,  
fill your lives with his light and joy and peace;  
and the blessing of God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
remain with you always. **Amen.**

© Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1999