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When God is a Child



USPG: Anglicans in World Mission

works in direct partnership with Anglican Churches in over 50 countries, helping to support vital church work, including healthcare, education, leadership training and action for social justice.

In Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, we are enabling Anglican Churches to reach out to poor and marginalised communities in practical and life-changing ways.

In practice, this means we are helping local churches to run schools and hospitals, build houses and dig wells, and provide agricultural training for subsistence farmers. We also support church outreach, theological training and youth work programmes.

WEEK 1



Scripture Revelation 22:16-17

REFLECTION

These verses, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the 'bright morning star', come almost at the very end of the Bible. Perhaps echoing the language of the Old Testament which speaks of 'morning stars' singing for joy, the verses speak of both hope and longing.

The end of the Bible does not mean the conclusion of God's dealings with, and desires for, humanity: rather, since Jesus is the 'bright morning star', we are being promised the brightness of the dawning of a new day.

The Venerable Bede wrote: *'Christ is the morning star who, when the night of this world is past, brings to his saints the promise of the light of life and opens everlasting day.'*

Quite literally, verse 17 is a party invitation – a welcome to God's feast of life to which all are invited. Like a star shining through the dark night, Jesus illuminates our path, guiding us towards this party at God's own home.

USPG PROJECT

Millions in Myanmar are suffering untold hardships. One in ten babies will die before their fifth birthday. Of the children that survive, only a quarter will complete their primary education. This situation is worst in the border regions of the country, where minority ethnic groups and most Christian communities live. The Dioceses of Mandalay, Yangon and Toungoo have set up schools for children who would otherwise miss out on an education.

PRAYER

Jesus, child of hope,
Born into the darkness of our world,
To shine like a bright morning star in the Advent sky.
Shed your light upon us and dispel the shadows
That dog the dark corners in our own lives.

As we light this flame, may we become
beacons of hope,
Illuminating the path for others.

SONG

Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.

*When God is a child
there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first
and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

WEEK 2



Scripture Isaiah 9:6-7

REFLECTION

This beloved bible reading, often used in the Advent season, is cherished for its proclamation of the birth of the Prince of Peace. It originates from one of the darkest periods of Israel's history – when people were suffering savage military oppression at the hands of the Assyrians. People were indeed living in 'a land of deep darkness'.

Yet it is into this terrible situation that the prophet Isaiah speaks – he is so sure of God's saving power that he can use the past tense: 'a child has been born for us'. It is difficult to read these verses without also remembering that the land where this child of peace was born is today a place of 'no peace'. And perhaps the symbol of a ribbon circling the earth tells us that in the twenty-first century all are interconnected. The pain – or the peace – of one part of our world cannot leave other parts untouched.

USPG PROJECT

In a region embroiled in conflict, St Luke's Hospital, in the West Bank city of Nablus, is providing a vital health service, without discriminating against a patient's nationality, religion or ability to pay.

Founded by Anglicans in 1901, the hospital helps to provide healthcare to Nablus's growing population. Christians and Muslims work side-by-side. Almost all the patients are Muslim.

PRAYER

Jesus, child of peace,
Born into a world of strife,
To break down dividing walls of hostility,
Inspire us to become bridge-builders rather
than barrier-makers,
Passionate for peace among people both near and far.

As we light this flame, may we become still
pools of peace,
Striving for reconciliation in our world.

SONG

Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.

*When God is a child
there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first
and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

WEEK 3



Scripture Luke 2:10-14

REFLECTION

Joy resounds through the birth stories of Luke's Gospel like a reverberating chorus. It is promised to Zechariah (1:14) and accompanies John's birth (1:58). It is expressed when Mary and Elizabeth meet, and then when Mary sings her song (1:44, 47).

So the heavenly chorus on the night of Jesus' birth becomes an exultant climax, reinforcing the angel's assurance to the frightened shepherds: 'I am bringing you good news of great joy'.

So strong is this note of rejoicing that Luke's Gospel is sometimes called 'the Gospel of Joy'. But it is a special kind of joy that Luke offers us – a sense of wondering surprise that the weight of our world, with its norms, its inequalities, its gap between rich and poor, has, through God's activity, been turned upside down. What better sign of this can there be than the joy that surrounds a child born in a borrowed manger!

USPG PROJECT

Trinidad and Tobago is a nation facing rising crime rates, particularly among young people who face the temptation of a growing gang culture. Richard Owen, a USPG Mission Companion, has been asked by the Anglican Church to implement an exciting programme of music tuition in schools. Richard says: 'Music making in many forms is an integral and vibrant part of Trinbagonian culture and we want to use music to transform lives positively.'

PRAYER

Jesus, child of joy,
At whose birth the heavens sang,
Celebrating God's good news to humanity,
Exhilarate us with your surprising salvation,
Your song of love harmonised to God's own key.

As we light this flame, may we become
instruments of joy,
Re-echoing your glory through our world.

SONG

Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born.

*When God is a child
there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first
and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

WEEK 4



CHRISTMAS DAY



Scripture 1 John 3:1-3

REFLECTION

Christian mystics often link 'love' with the symbol of 'flame' (think of the hymn *Come Down, O Love Divine*), but the Bible itself rarely does. However, here John reflects on the extravagance of God's love for us 'that we should be called children of God', linking it to our desire to purify ourselves and, of course, one of the ways that purification happens is through fire and burning.

We are so overwhelmed by the generosity of God's love, through the birth of Jesus, who has enabled us also to become children of God, that we cannot bear to stand before God's love contaminated by any unworthiness. Though we don't always think of love in this way, God's love at Christmas offers us a profound challenge, a challenge to which we are inspired to respond to – even beyond our imagining.

USPG PROJECT

In Port Elizabeth, South Africa, the church-run House of Resurrection Haven cares for those living with HIV. It is a place of love and security, where some regain their lost strength, and others are able to end their days among compassionate friends. Children who have been orphaned or abandoned or who have very sick parents are given a loving home where they can play, sing and learn.

PRAYER

Jesus, child of love,
Cherished son of Mary,
Beloved son and gift of God.
Ignite your love to flame and sparkle within us,
So that all may see that we are your brothers and sisters, members of God's own family.

As we light this flame, may we become the promise of light and warmth for others, so that your hope, peace, joy and love may spread throughout the world, this Christmas and always.

SONG

Love is a flame that burns in our heart.
Jesus has come and will never depart.

*When God is a child
there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first
and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

SONG: When God is a Child

1. Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.

Refrain
When God is a child
there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first
and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.

2. Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.

Refrain

3. Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born.

Refrain

4. Love is a flame that burns in our heart.
Jesus has come and will never depart.

Refrain

Brian Wren (born 1936)

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Joan Collier Fogg
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