

With a Welcome from Archbishops
Justin Welby and Stephen Cottrell



Follow The Star

Join
the **Song**



**12 Days of Reflections for
Christmas and the New Year**



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Welcome

from Archbishops Justin Welby and Stephen Cottrell

“The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen ...”

Luke 2.20 (GNB)

The shepherds were astonished to find the night sky filled with angels singing God’s praise. And before long they were singing, too, praising God and sharing their joy at having seen Jesus, the promised Saviour.

Centuries later, singing is still central to how many of us celebrate Christmas. Around the country – and the world – young and old will gather in churches, schools and concert halls, on high streets, hospital wards and village greens, to hear and sing carols.

As we gather in worship this Christmas and join the song of the angels, may we all be drawn deeper into the wonder and the truth of Christmas: in the birth of Jesus, God becomes human, heaven embraces earth.

We invite you this Christmas to follow the star, journey to the manger, join the song and come into the presence of Jesus Christ – a relationship which begins at Christmas but lasts for ever.

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Day 1 **Christmas Eve** The hopes and fears of all the years

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Day 2 **Christmas Day** He came down to earth from heaven

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Day 3 **Boxing Day** Joy to the world! The Lord is come

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Day 4 **27 December** How silently the wondrous gift is given

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Day 5 **28 December** “Fear not,” said he, for mighty dread ...

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Day 6 **29 December** Fall on your knees

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Day 7 **30 December** Son of God, love’s pure light

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Day 8 **New Year** In heaven the bells are ringing

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Day 9 **2 January** O star of wonder

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Day 10 **3 January** What can I give him, poor as I am?

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Day 11 **4 January** Peace on earth and mercy mild

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Day 12 **5 January** Evermore and evermore

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Introduction

In the next 12 days we will join Mary, Joseph, several shepherds, a stable full of animals – and, later, Magi from a different land – and come into the presence of a child who will change the world.

Presence is a relationship beyond words. It is being truly present with someone. It is being attentive to their whole being so deeply that we are changed by them.

A friend who is a new mother said to me recently, “I have had to give my baby so much attention 24 hours a day that I haven’t even had a moment to pray.”

“What do you mean?” I said, “that is your prayer.” Devotion, care, attention, being in the presence of the beloved in all our moods. That is how God loves us.

I hope and pray that, as we hear the story of Jesus’ birth, we may once more enter and dwell in his presence as he dwells in us.

For each of the twelve days of Christmas you will find:

- a short **reading** from the Bible to read and meditate on
- a **reflection** challenging us to see the Christmas story afresh
- an “**I wonder ...**” inviting us to consider what this Christmas means within the story of our own lives today;
- finally, a **prayer** as we – like Mary and Joseph – treasure this story in our hearts and carry it with us.

Richard Carter

Associate Vicar, St Martin-in-the-Fields

The hopes and fears of all the years



Think of the preparation that goes into giving birth – scans, plans, midwives and clinics. Now imagine having none of these – in a foreign city, on the streets and no one will let you in.

Read Luke 2.1-7

“Mary gave birth to her firstborn son ... and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn.”

I spent many years as a priest in the South Pacific as chaplain to a religious community.

It is Christmas night on the island of Nggela. I am about to lead the midnight service when a message comes. A teenage girl is having a baby. She is in agony and cannot deliver. Two of the community rush to find her alone on the dirt floor of an outside kitchen. She is screaming. The villagers know the baby has been conceived outside marriage. No one comes to help.

“What did you do?” I ask them later.

“We knelt down with her, and I said, ‘When Jesus was born, he was born just like this ... He is with you now.’ The child was born – and as she held her tiny baby, the whole night was filled with his light.”

I wonder ...

*What are your greatest fears? Your greatest hopes?
How are they met in the birth of Jesus tonight?*

Emmanuel – God With Us – be with us this Christmas and transform our struggles, our hopes and our fears with the light of your love. Amen.

He came down from to earth from heaven



Today heaven breaks into our world and our world breaks into heaven. The star points to it, and the angels proclaim it – a child is born for us.

Read Isaiah 9.2-7

“For a child has been born for us ... and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

“We invite you ... to journey to the manger, join the song and come into the presence of Jesus Christ – a relationship which begins at Christmas but lasts for ever.”

ARCHBISHOPS JUSTIN WELBY AND STEPHEN COTTRELL

***Follow The Star – Join The Song* invites you to hear and respond to the angels’ invitation to gather in the presence of the newborn Jesus.**

For each day from Christmas Eve to the Eve of Epiphany (5 January), this booklet offers a short **reading** from the Bible, a **reflection** challenging you to see the Christmas story afresh, an invitation to **wonder** what this Christmas means in your own life, and a **prayer** to help you treasure this story in your heart.

Follow The Star – Join The Song is the Church of England’s theme for Advent and Christmas 2023.

You’re very welcome at a church near you this Advent and Christmas. Find your nearest services and events and get involved via **AChurchNearYou.com**

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