

# CHRISTMAS EVE A – ST HELEN'S, ABINGDON

24 December 2025



Isaiah 52.7–10 / Hebrews 1.1–4 / John 1.1–14

‘The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.’

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – *Amen*

**Y**OU MAY HAVE NOTICED THAT IT IS DARK OUT; it has been dark since late afternoon, and in a larger sense it has been a bleak *year* for many of us: the news on the BBC, the losses from among our own congregations, our dear ones. Now is the winter of our discontent, and no sun of York is making these days into a glorious summer. Sometimes the public signs of holiday festivity even *intensify* the sense of a hard day's year. And we gather at mid night, under cover of this darkness, and the choruses of ‘Joy!’ that we expect this night may for some of us seem more like a threat than a gift.

Tonight's joy, tonight's glory stands *just* out of our line of sight, just *over* the horizon. I *promise* you that the glorious joy waits there. But in this respect, God's glory differs from mortal sunshine: the sun rises and sets willy-nilly, like it or not, regular as clockwork — but God's glory *waits*. God doesn't stomp onto the scene merrily, reckless of our feelings, heedless of weariness or grief. God *waits*, because *waiting* belongs to our human condition, our *midnight* condition, and tonight above *all* nights our very particular humanity, our temporality, even our own *feelings* receive the dignity of God's honour.

Tonight we give honour to human-ness, because *God* honoured human-ness. Indeed, God has been granting us honours and gifts all along: life in a perfect, splendid garden with everything we could ask; companionship with a God who bestows a vast family with untold blessings; a Law to rule our lives such that by adhering to it, we might *live* in the truest, holiest, *best* versions of our selves and our possibilities. God spoke to us of old by the prophets, calling us do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly before God. God laid all these possibilities at our feet, and in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, who reflects the glory of God. Tonight, that is, God crowned all our blessings by entering our world as *one of us*, as a *particular* one of us, unique as *each* of us is and yet unique in a way *nobody* else is. God loves us so much that he became flesh and lived among us, inhabiting our mortality, walking the walk, feeling the feelings, *including* the painful feelings of rejection and abandonment, because those feelings — like *waiting* — go with being human. And above all honours, God made it possible for *us* to become children of God.

God honours *us*, our *humanness*, and even at midnight brings us the promise of dawn. The light shines in the darkness — maybe just a blink, maybe just a twinkle, maybe your neighbour can see it even if you can't — the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not overwhelm it. *Could* not, and *will* not, no matter how bleak the midwinter midnight gets.

In token of that promised dawn, the light is born tonight, and we have seen his glory. For it is the God who said 'Let light shine out from darkness' who *has* shone, who *still* shines in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We have seen that glory in the face of a newborn baby; we have seen God's glory in the self-giving ministrations offered by nurses and careers, by porters and servers, *baristas* and *bartenders*, by volunteers in the Food Bank and in hospices and the Abingdon Bridge. And we gather here to *share* in that light, to remind one another of that light, and by God's grace sometimes

to help *dial up* that light, maybe just a momentary spark or a twinkle, maybe sometimes all the way up to eleven.

Now, it's possible that we have a few visitors tonight, visitors whom we welcome with joy. We understand that you may not *want* to be here, but you've come here out of affection and respect for someone who brought you along. That affection and that respect provide the fuel that nourishes and strengthens the light I'm talking about: the true light, which enlightens everyone, is coming into the world. And your commitment to the truth as you understand it is *exactly* what *our faith* is about, albeit in a different configuration. You're adding *your* light to *ours*, and we give you hearty thanks for that. No pop quizzes, no stern looks from the sidesmen, just gratitude for your presence — for you, too, have been drawn here by a light, even if it's a light that somebody *else* spotted and brought you along to see.

Midwinter midnight strikes, and it is bleak indeed, with only a faint crescent moon; and the night *surrounds* us, *seeping* into us, *leaching* into our flesh, our bones, and we have no immunity to it. But this is a special night, a *holy* night, and in the Name of Jesus, the chains that oppress us, that enslave us, fall away, setting us free to love one another as he loves us. In the face of midnight, against the chill, in *defiance* of grief and dashed hopes and hard times and harrowing prospects on the horizon, in *resistance* to rejection, loss, wars and rumours of war, we raise up the radiance of a holy child, and invite *everyone* to share in the light, the *glory* of that radiance. For to those who receive this child, this Prince of Peace, this Wonderful Counselor, he has given the chance to become *children* of God, *heirs* to the kingdom of heaven, a royal priesthood serving our God; he has shown us a light, an *inextinguishable* light, a light of pure glory, and we lift it up high, as high as we can reach, lifting one another up, so that *all* people may see the light of God's glory; indeed, we came tonight as witnesses to testify to this light, so that *all* might receive him. This was a

hard year; and yet *every* year brings forth its own particular midnight weariness and woe. But the LORD *will* comfort his people; tonight we testify that the Word *became flesh* and dwelt among us, *dwells* among us, and we *have seen* his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, *full of grace and truth*; and we lift up our voices and sing with joy, for what has been born among us in this dark but *oh! so holy* night, O night divine! — what has been born in us is life, and the life is the light of us *all* —

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit —

*Amen*