

ST HILDA'S ASHFORD



THE FIRST MASS OF
CHRISTMAS 2023

WELCOME TO ST HILDA'S ASHFORD FOR OUR TRADITIONAL MIDNIGHT MASS OF CHRISTMAS

This service is held at night in line with the Western Christian tradition that Jesus was born during the night. From early Jewish times, it was held that the day began in the evening, and to this day in modern Christian liturgy, the Office of Evening Prayer is the first act of worship of the day.

This is a service of great joy and celebration when we do two distinct things: first, we celebrate the historical account when we greet Jesus and the Holy Family in his stable. Secondly, we commemorate the spiritual significance of God's Incarnation into human form as the means of our Salvation. We therefore bless the crib at the start of the service, and then we hear the words of John's Gospel at the end to connect these two aspects of our celebration.

*Eternal God,
in the stillness of this night
you sent your almighty Word
to pierce the world's darkness with the light of salvation:
give to the earth the peace that we long for
and fill our hearts with the joy of heaven
through our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

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Cover illustration by Andrew Milton

All stand as the minister enters the church

THE GATHERING

Introit Hymn

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
'Peace on the earth, good-will to men,
From heaven's all gracious King!'
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled;
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing;
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring:
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!

For lo! the days are hastening on,
 By prophet bards foretold,
When, with the ever circling years,
 Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
 Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song
 Which now the angels sing.

[Edmund Sears]

The Greeting

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Blessing of the Crib

Dear friends, as we meet to celebrate the birth of Christ,
let us pray that God will bless this crib, that all who
worship his Son, born of the Virgin Mary, may come to
share his life in glory.

God our Father, on this night
your Son Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary
for us and for our salvation:
bless this crib,
which we have prepared to celebrate that holy birth;
may all who see it be strengthened in faith
and receive the fullness of life he came to bring,
who is alive and reigns for ever. **Amen.**

The Christmas Candle

Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Today is Christmas Day, in which we recall the hope we have in Christ. Today we light again the candles of hope, peace, love and joy.

(Each candle will be lit as the reader speaks)

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, King of peace:
to you be praise and glory for ever.

The new light of your incarnate Word
gives gladness in our sorrow,
and a presence in our isolation.

Fill our lives with your light,
until they overflow with gladness and praise.

All Blessed be God for ever.

(We light the fifth candle, to mark the Birth of Christ)

People of God: shout and sing!
Tell the good news of peace on earth.
Lord, bring us today into Christ's peace.
All God's people shout: **Amen!**

Angels dance and the bright star shines.
All creation bows to the Lord of all.
Lord, bring us today into Christ's light.
All God's people shout: **Amen!**

One with us, yet born to save,
he will show us the way to God.
Lord, bring us today into Christ's love.
All God's people shout: **Amen!**

People of God: shout and sing:

All Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

Prayers of Penitence

Christ the Light of the world has come
to dispel the darkness of our hearts.
Let us turn to the light and confess our sins.

[Silence is kept]

God our Father,
you sent your Son full of grace and truth:
forgive our failure to receive him.

All Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Jesus our Saviour,
you were born in poverty and laid in a manger:
forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.
Christ, have mercy.

All **Christ, have mercy.**

Spirit of Love,
your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call:
forgive the hardness of our hearts.

Lord, have mercy.

All **Lord, have mercy.**

May the God of all healing and forgiveness
draw you to himself,
that you may behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh,
and be cleansed from all your sins
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Gloria in Excelsis

**Glory to God in the highest,
All and peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.**

Amen.

The Collect - *The Collect is said after a moment of silence*

Eternal God,
who made this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:
bring us, who have known the revelation of that light on earth,
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Old Testament Reading – Isaiah 52 vv 7 – 10

How beautiful upon the mountains
 are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
 who announces salvation,
 who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’
Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
 together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
 the return of the Lord to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,
 you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
 he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord has bared his holy arm
 before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
 the salvation of our God.

At the end the reader may say

This is the word of the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.

Anthem: Gaudete

Gospel Reading – John 1 vv 1 – 14

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

All Glory to you, O Lord.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All Praise to you, O Christ.

The Sermon

The Creed

Let us declare our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**All We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and
glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

The prayers end with the following:

Merciful Father

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE SACRAMENT

The Peace – All stand

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,
and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you

All and also with you.

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

All may exchange a sign of peace.

Offertory Hymn

During this hymn a collection will be taken to be given to the Bishop's Discretionary Fund.

Once in royal David's city
 Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
 In a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven,
 Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable,
 And his cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And, through all his wondrous childhood,
 Day by day, like us he grew;
He was little, weak and helpless,
 Tears and smiles like us he knew;
And he feeleth for our sadness,
And he shareth in our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
 Through his own redeeming love,
For that Child so dear and gentle
 Is our Lord in heaven above:
And he leads his children on
To the place where he is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
 With the oxen standing by,
We shall see him; but in heaven,
 Set at God's right hand on high;
Where like stars his children crowned
All in white shall wait around.

[*Mrs. C. F. Alexander*]

The table is prepared, and bread and wine are placed upon it.

With this bread that we bring

All we shall remember Jesus.

With this wine we bring

All we shall remember Jesus.

Bread for his body,

wine for his blood,

gifts from God to his table we bring.

All we shall remember Jesus.

Eucharistic Prayer

The Lord be with you

All and also with you

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere,
mighty creator, ever-living God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who for love of our fallen race humbled himself,
was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of your Spirit,
and lived as one of us.

In this mystery of the Word made flesh
you have caused his light to shine in our hearts,
to give knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.
In him we see our God made visible
and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see.

Therefore with all the angels of heaven
we lift our voices to proclaim the glory of your name
and sing our joyful hymn of praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the Highest.**

Lord, you are holy indeed, the source of all holiness;
grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit ✺,
and according to your holy will,
these gifts of bread and wine
may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ;
who, in the same night that he was betrayed,
took bread and gave you thanks;
he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying:
*Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.*

In the same way, after supper
he took the cup and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them, saying:
*Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.*

Great is the mystery of faith
**All Christ has died:
Christ is risen:
Christ will come again.**

And so, Father, calling to mind his death on the cross,
his perfect sacrifice
made once for the sins of the whole world;
rejoicing in his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension,
and looking for his coming in glory,
we celebrate this memorial of our redemption.

As we offer you this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving,
we bring before you this bread and this cup
and we thank you for counting us worthy
to stand in your presence and serve you.

Send the Holy Spirit on your people
and gather into one in your kingdom
all who share this one bread and one cup,
so that we, in the company of all the saints,
may praise and glorify you for ever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord;
by whom, and with whom, and in whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory be yours, almighty Father,
for ever and ever.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us,
And as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

All Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Breaking of the Bread

The president breaks the consecrated bread.

We break the bread of life,
and that life is the light of the world.

All God here among us,
light in the midst of us,
bring us to light and life.

Agnus Dei

Lamb of God,
All you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.

Giving of Communion

Christ is the true bread which has come down from heaven.

All Lord, give us this bread always.

The president and people receive communion.

At St Hilda's, we welcome communicant members of all churches to receive Holy Communion. Alternatively, you are invited to receive a personal blessing. If you would like a blessing, please cross your arms over your chest to help us know your intention. Come one, come all!

Communion Hymns

Carol: This is the truth sent from above

[Traditional]

Carol: Jesus Christ the apple tree

[© Elizabeth Poston 1967, transferred to Campion Press.]

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
And stay by my bedside till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven, to live with thee there.

[Anonymous]

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
 Sleep in heavenly peace,
 Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
 Christ the Saviour is born,
 Christ the Saviour is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light;
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
 Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

**Silent night! Holy night!
Wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing
"Alleluia" to our King:
"Christ the Saviour is born!
Christ the Saviour is born."**

[Joseph Mohr tr. J. Freeman Young]

Prayers after Communion

Silence is kept after which the Post-Communion prayer is said.

God our Father,
in this night you have made known to us again
the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him
until the day dawns
and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.
To him be glory both now and for ever. **Amen.**

All: Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out
in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Blessing

May the Father, who has loved the eternal Son
from before the foundation of the world,
shed that love upon you his children.

All Amen.

May Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one
things earthly and heavenly,
fill you with joy and peace.

All Amen.

May the Holy Spirit,
by whose overshadowing Mary became the God-bearer,
give you grace to carry the good news of Christ.

All Amen.

Go in peace. Proclaim the Word made flesh.

All Glory, thanks and praise to God.

Recessional Hymn

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him, born the King of angels:

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!*

**God of God, Light of Light,
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, begotten, not created:**

Refrain

**See how the shepherds, Summoned to his cradle,
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;
We too will thither Bend our joyful footsteps:**

Refrain

**Child, for us sinners poor and in the manger,
Fain we embrace thee, with awe and love;
Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?**

Refrain

**Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God in the highest:**

Refrain

**Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesu, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.**

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!*

[Latin 18th century tr. Frederick Oakeley & others]

*Wishing you, your family and friends
a safe and blessed Christmas.*

Praying for peace in Israel and Gaza

Bishop Sarah encourages us to join in with Archbishop Hosam Naoum of Jerusalem, who has offered the following prayer:

O God of all justice and peace, we cry out to you in the midst of the pain and trauma of violence and fear which prevails in the Holy Land.

Be with those who need you in these days of suffering; we pray for people of all faiths – Jews, Muslims and Christians and for all people of the land.

While we pray to you, O Lord, for an end to violence and the establishment of peace, we also call for you to bring justice and equity to the peoples. Guide us into your kingdom where all people are treated with dignity and honour as your children – for to all of us you are our Heavenly Father.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Contact Information

Vicar

Vacant

Licensed Lay Minister

Rosalyn Young rosalyn@sthilda.org

Churchwarden

Paula Gething

PCC Secretary

Liz Brian

Email: secretary@sthilda.org

PCC Treasurer

Vicky Palmer

treasurer@sthilda.org

Church Hall Bookings

Chris Davenport

01784 252170

The Parish Office:

St Hilda's Church, Stanwell Road, Ashford, Middlesex
TW15 3QL

Telephone: 01784 253525 Email: office@sthilda.org

Website: www.sthilda.org

Charity Number: 1134119

CCLI: 708985

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