

CHURCH LEADERS CHRISTMAS PACK

Immanuel
* **GOD** *
is with us

evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known



Thank you!

Dear friends

I guess you have noticed that Christmas is coming; and with it all the opportunities, but for many some pain and significant pressure.

As this pack of resources goes out to church leaders across the UK, we at the Evangelical Alliance wanted to first and foremost take the opportunity to say thank you for your willingness to serve Christ by serving His church. Alongside the joys and privileges of leadership, thank you for your willingness to be misunderstood, spoken ill of and pressurised to be available at all times of day and night. Leadership has the potential to be a lonely place, particularly with all the expectations of Christmas and we can be left feeling that nobody really understands.

It is at times like this that I find it important to remind myself that the message of the angel to Mary applies to me 2,000 years on, “They call him Emmanuel (which means God with us)”. Thank God, He doesn’t want us to do this church leadership thing on our own, He promises to be with us, most wonderfully through the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is not simply alongside us but dwelling within us. I’ve come to the conclusion that any leadership, particularly in the church, is impossible and indeed can be dangerous without the daily recognition of my need to be filled with the spirit. As you approach this Christmas season, may you know that strengthening, equipping and encouraging that only He can bring.

I also trust that this pack of resources will provide an encouragement from the team here at the Evangelical Alliance. In the pack you’ll find a brief sermon outline from Gavin Calver on the theme of ‘God is with us’, a couple of articles exploring discipleship and mission for church leaders at Christmas, and some prayers to help you get through the Christmas season in conversation with our God.

Your friend,



Steve Clifford



SEEING CLEARLY

“Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose and we have come to worship Him”. Matthew 2:2

Living Jesus

At this Christmas time there seems to be such a fog around me.

*Have I bought the right stuff? Who should be invited? Who have I forgotten?
Lord, help me to follow your light;*

One step at a time, moving always to the place of worship and adoration.

Help me Lord to rise above the consumerist clouds that engulf my life that I may see your glorious presence more clearly than ever before

Despite opposition, confusion and distraction keep me moving to the place of love.

In Jesus name,

Amen



CHRISTMAS SERMON OUTLINE

We know how busy the Christmas season can be and how hard it can be to plan for the many services and celebrations church leaders take part in. Our director of mission, Gavin Calver, has put together a sermon outline as a starter to get you thinking about how you can share the joy of knowing that God is with us this Christmas.

God is with us

Matthew 1:23 – “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and he will be called Immanuel which means ‘God is with us’”

Introduction:

- The average Westerner has 7000 calories at Christmas, the hardest person to buy for is Dad.
- I love Christmas but some stuff around it irritates me, particularly Christmas cards: they make the nativity look cute and are full of florescent figures.
 - Mary is dressed as a blue nun which doesn't seem like the immediate top choice for giving birth in;
 - the animals are smiling and they clearly don't poo;
 - the crib is wonderfully made and the hay smells like a meadow.
 - There were 3 wise men in the same place at the same time – is that even possible?
 - The way the scene is portrayed is just miles away from reality.
- What we really celebrate this Christmas is Jesus coming into the world in a hugely challenging context in order that the world might come to know Him.

Don't miss Him:

- Don't miss Christmas.
- “Bible” means “library”. There are 322 Old Testament messianic prophecies – the how, where, what, and even death of Jesus. Even the number of coins for betraying Him is prophesied!



CHRISTMAS SERMON OUTLINE

- The Saducess & the Pharisees both missed it! They would only needed to have walked five miles to meet the new born Jesus.
 - You can be religious and not know the truth!
- “Jerusalem is nine miles north of Bethlehem. The wise men had a long intellectual history but they had missed their goal by nine miles. They miscalculated by that much.” – Walter Brueggemann
- King Herod missed it too. Herod was a King but Christ was the King.
- Many of us are looking for God in the wrong place.
 - Stop following worldly things and go after the King of the world.
- The invisible God becomes visible in Jesus – but sometimes we leave Him as a baby. To understand the significance of His birth you have to understand His life and move from the cradle to the cross.
 - **Gospel push**

He’s with us:

- The gift of Christmas is Christ. As the evangelist J. John says, “If you remove Christ from Christmas then all you’re left with is M&S!”
- We receive stuff we don’t need whilst God offers us a gift we can’t live without.
- ‘Immanuel’ means ‘God is with us.’
 - It’s not a prayer, it’s a statement; it’s so ultimate & exclusive.
 - God has got through to us.
 - Jesus is the way. This Jesus is not an option, He’s the way, the truth and the life.
- **Gospel push**

Conclusion:

- This Christmas are you focussed on Jesus?
- The gospel that begins here with the assurance that this baby to be born would be Immanuel closes in the great commission of Matthew 28 with the assurance that He is with them still and will be till the end of time.
- Whatever you are facing, wherever you are... He is with you.



MINDFUL

“My Spirit rejoices in God my saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant”. Luke 1: 47-48

Beautiful saviour,

I give you the all I can give you, every beat of my heart creates a rhythm of praise.

You deserve all of me.

You are the one who came for me. You saw me in my weakness.

You heard every silent scream- every question I have ever asked

*Lord, every time I have been rejected, abandoned, abused
You have been mindful.*

You came because you felt I was worth it,

You were mindful of my state and you drew near.

*Jesus you are worthy of all my life, love and worship
You deserve it all.*

Worthy, worthy, worthy are you Lord

Amen



I AM MY BELOVED'S AND HE IS MINE

Jo Frost, Director of communications and membership

Most of us, for better or worse, find Christmas to be a season of extremes: emotional highs and overwhelming lows. But, in all of it we are reminded, through the story of Jesus' birth, that God is Emmanuel, with us through it all. When God made Himself flesh, limited Himself to such an extent that He became as small as a tiny, helpless baby, He did so to be one of us. So, when life gets busy and stressful and chaotic and overwhelming, we can remember that our beloved is with us, has been there too, and will never abandon us.

"When Jesus is with us, all is well and nothing seems difficult," Thomas à Kempis wrote. "But when Jesus is not with us, everything is hard." Everything is hard when we don't remember to welcome Jesus into our situation or daily life.

Revelation 3:20 says: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." How can I remember, when writing my next sermon, organising the fifth Christmas party that week, panic buying my forgotten aunt's Christmas present, that Jesus is knocking and waiting to be invited in?

It's so blindly obvious that Jesus should be a part of our Christmas, we preach it, tweet it, and parade it. But do we remember to practice what we preach?

Jesus Emmanuel reminds us that Jesus isn't

another friend on the list of people to buy a present for, nor is following Him another item on the to-do list. Rather, He is our consistent companion throughout all of it. Jesus travels with us, into every meeting, every service, every party, every encounter. Discipleship isn't an activity to be shoehorned in between Christingle services; discipleship is practicing an awareness of the Emmanuel as we journey through the season of Christmas.

Jesus teaches us how to practice being aware of His presence. He asks us to listen to His voice (John 10:16). We are assured that we will recognise the Prince of peace when He speaks to us, that His voice will cut through all the noise and guide us through. It's much easier to listen when we're quiet than when we're still talking. Finding space and time to be silent isn't a luxury we can ill-afford at Christmas; it's a necessity we can't afford to do without.

Jesus shows us how when life is busy, when we are tired and struggling to meet the needs of all those who depend on us, we can retreat to quiet places so that we can be reminded that we are children of God, that our Father delights in us and rejoices over us. Even if you can be still for a few moments at a time, be assured, when Jesus is with you, all is well and nothing will seem difficult.

You are your beloved's and He is yours.
Grace and peace to you this Christmas.



GLORY TO GOD

“Suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising god and saying. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.” Luke 2: 13-14

Lord Jesus, sometimes I am so timid. I am quiet

A background person, always a little grey, inoffensive

Lord, today help me to be a person who celebrates your wonderful birth

Let me join heavenly choirs

Bash tambourines

Hug strangers

Dance unashamedly

Join with angels and creation and scream;

He has come and God's favour rests on me.

Lord, this Christmas let my life be one that sings your praises

In the wonderful name of Jesus

Amen



“IT’S CHRISTMAS EVE, EVE!”

Eve Balshaw, Great Commission co-ordinator

Believe it or not, with the name Eve, I’ve heard this joke just a few times. It’s rolled out every year without fail and yet the joker’s face still lights up with glee as if, not only is this the best joke ever, but obviously this must be the first time I’ve ever heard it.

Can you imagine if we shared the story of Christmas with the same excitement?

The issue is, however, that as church leaders and hardened nativity-play-watchers, the story isn’t new to us. Every year, we preach on it, sing about it, and act it out, but sadly somewhere along the way the two-thousand-year-old epic has become commonplace to us – even those whose profession is to share it. And with the way we’ve sterilised the whole scene, sat it in miniature in our front rooms, freed it from the stench of cow dung and the pain of medically unaided childbirth, perhaps it’s no surprise that we’re rarely shocked as we remember the story, or captivated as we tell it to others.

This Christmas, before we write our Christmas preaches and consume more mince pies than we have parishioners, we can take the opportunity to marvel afresh at the donkey ride to Bethlehem, the visit from the wise men, and the signposting of the star. But I want to challenge us that if the nativity is the only part of the story we tell, then we will do the author a great disservice.

People are expecting to hear about Jesus at Christmas, so as leaders of the church, we have a unique opportunity – and responsibility – to show them Jesus in all His fullness. As we plan our Christingle services and Carols by Candlelight, we want to create space for people to encounter not only God incarnate as baby Jesus, but also Jesus the teacher in the streets, the healer in the synagogue, the king crucified, and the murdered saviour raised to life.

For many people in the UK, their impression of Jesus is who we show them He is – a terrifying but sobering thought. So if we are insular, celebrating Christmas exclusively within our families, how does the world know that Jesus came to earth to include them in His family? If we sound tired of regurgitating the nativity once again, how do people know that Jesus’ mercies are new every day and His grace for us never runs out? If we only show the world the baby in the manger, how do they know that the same man died on the cross and now has the power to atone for their sins?

How we celebrate Christmas matters, because not only do we lead by example, but how we celebrate says something about who we’re celebrating – whether explicitly or implicitly. Even if we think people must surely know the Christmas story by now, we can’t afford to tire of the golden opportunity to show them Jesus.

We may have heard it all a thousand times before, but the angels are still singing, the orchestra are still in the pit, and there is still an opportunity for others to join the throng...

Can you imagine if we saw revival this Christmas? People came to our churches expecting to hear about the infant babe and we offered them the chance to meet the risen saviour?

That’s what I’m asking for this Christmas.

So as we share the good news of Jesus’ birth and the saviour He grew up to be, let’s do so as if it’s the first time we’ve ever heard it – because, for some people, it could be. And not only that, but let’s say it with a level of enthusiasm that can only come from the belief that what we’re saying is the best news ever – because, for all of us, it is.



MOVED ON

“She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them”. Luke 2:7

Lord Jesus, saviour, and redeemer

Help me, as I put up my decorations and pick out all the treats to remember that you earthly family were forced to travel away from their home because of an occupying force.

Lord, I pray for all those who are victims in war, those who have had to flee their homes

Lord, when it came to your birth you couldn't get a room, you ended up in the cold, getting some warmth in straw.

Lord, you choose not to be born in a palace with a million nannies.

You came into vulnerability, lowliness.

Lord Jesus, saviour with the servant spirit

I pray for those trapped in poverty.

I pray for the weak, homeless, broken and abused.

I pray for those who see Christmas as a reminder of failure rather than as a time of hope.

I thank you that Christmas reveals your heart – the God who draws near to the lowly and poor of spirit, and is Good news to the poor.

Lord, this Christmas help me to be part of your plan to set captives free.

In Jesus name

Amen



Together making Jesus known

**BECOME AN INDIVIDUAL
MEMBER TODAY**



**Join through our website
and get your welcome gift**

eauk.org/joinus



THE VIRGIN WILL CONCEIVE
AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND
THEY WILL CALL HIM



Emmanuel
which means **GOD**



is with us

