*All Age Eucharist & Nativity: Come to the Stable – A Special Invitation*

**Wow! What an amazing story & an amazing invitation** – to join Mary & Joseph, with the Shepherds & the Wise Men, at the Stable, in Bethlehem, to witness the Birth of Jesus.

**I don’t know how you feel when you receive a special invitation** – it might be to a birthday party, or a special day-out with friends, or even (if you’re really important!) to a reception at Buckingham Palace, Cambridge Guildhall or Ely Cathedral.

*Can anyone tell us* about a really special invitation they received, and how it made you feel?

**Well it’s must have been pretty amazing** for those first visitors to the Stable in Bethlehem: the shepherds on the hill-side and the wise men travelling from the East.

*How do you think they would have felt?*

**I think that both groups of visitors must have been pretty surprised** don’t you, but for different reasons?

* *The shepherds* because they were used to being on the edge of things, kept on the margins, and not normally treated with respect or reverence. Imagine those hard-working dirty, messy shepherds, used to the rough and tumble of the hillsides, called – by angels – to witness the birth of God’s Son!
* And what about *the wise men*? Well, I suspect the opposite may have been true for them. Up-marked educated astrologers from the East (from Persia, or modern-day Iran), who maybe were used to royal palaces and dignatories, but not to meeting a King in a cow shed, on the back-streets of down-town Bethlehem.

**And what about us? How do we feel about being invited** – in heart and mind – to go to the Stable, also, to meet God’s Son, the baby born Jesus Christ. *I wonder how you feel about being invited too?*

**So what’s the message for us?!**

* Today we remember that **at Christmas all of us are invited to the celebration in the Stable**, the coming of God’s own Son, our Saviour, Jesus; it doesn’t matter how we feel about ourselves, and being invited to the biggest event of all. We’re all invited and welcome here.
* Secondly, what matters about the message of Christmas, is that **we’re invited not just today – to go to the Stable – but we’re invited to be with Jesus always**; to know him and to love him, and to receive him into our lives. Yes, we’re invited to follow him, as Jesus grows up, and as we grow up to. We’re invited to know him and be guided by him, and loved by him, for always. The best possible Christmas present we could ever wish for, as we live and navigate a complex world.

And **this, after all, is the adventure of Christian life and faith**, of living as Baptized members of the Body of Christ – which is what we call his Church – being a friend and companion of this Jesus, always... wherever we are, and wherever we travel to.

+I’m going to end with **two short prayers, from the service of Baptism, which remind us of the true meaning and invitation of Christmas**, of following Jesus – on a life-long journey – our whole lives long.

**So I’d like to invite you to turn and face the font**, at the back of Church, as we hear these words of Commissioning, from the Baptism service, and therefore hear again the Invitation of Jesus to each of us + the Church’s prayer for our cleansing and equipping and new life, in following Him;

**Friends**, in Baptism God has touched you with his love and given you a place among his people.

God promised to be with you

in joy and in sorrow,

to be your guide in life,

and to bring you safely to heaven.

In baptism God invited you on a life-long journey.

Together with all God’s people

you were invited to explore the way of Jesus

and grow in friendship with God,

in love for his people,

and in serving others.

With us you were invited to listen to the word of God and receive the gifts of God.

**And let us pray:-**

God of mercy and love,

in baptism you welcome the sinner

and restore the dead to life.

You create a clean heart in those who repent,

and give your Holy Spirit to those who ask.

Grant that these your servants may grow

into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

Equip them with the gifts of your Holy Spirit,

and fill them with faith in Jesus Christ

and with love for all your people,

in the service of your kingdom. **Amen.**

**And so, friends, today we make this special journey to Bethlehem;** and we come to Jesus, our friend & companion on the way-

**+So I say to all of you, from today onwards, following Him & receiving His light:**

‘Shine as a light in the world, to the glory of God the Father.’ *Amen*

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