

# 11<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – Morning Service

There is room for all of nature

Rev Michael Payne

## Advent Liturgy

It's Advent. Not yet Christmas. It's not just time for you and me to prepare, it's time for all the world's different people to prepare; it's time to see God's message in all living created things, the cosmos, the environment around us. For we are intertwined, earth and heaven and people and plants and birds of the air and fish of the sea and beasts of the field. Let us take time to see the glory of the created world in all its bounty and beauty. When God reigns **there is room for all of nature.**

Let us take time to understand our interconnections. When God reigns **there is room for all of nature.**

Let us take time to see how our words, our deeds, our lives help or harm God's created order.

When God reigns **there is room for all of nature.**

Let us take time to see the environment around us today, flooded fields and parched wilderness, searing heat and icy cold. When God reigns **there is room for all of nature.**

Let us take time to make time to be passionate about God's gift of the created world.

When God reigns **there is room for all of nature.**

We lit our first candle for you and me. We lit our second candle for people who are different from us. Let us light our third candle for the environment and its care.

## StF 103 – God is love let heaven adore him

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| 1) God is Love: let heaven adore him;<br>God is Love: let earth rejoice;<br>Let creation sing before him,<br>And exalt him with one voice.<br>He who laid the earth's foundation,<br>He who spread the heavens above,<br>He who breathes through all creation,<br>He is Love, eternal Love. | 3) God is Love: and though with blindness<br>Sin afflicts each human soul,<br>God's eternal loving-kindness<br>Holds and guides and keeps them whole.<br>Sin and death and hell shall never<br>O'er us final triumph gain;<br>God is Love, so Love for ever<br>O'er the universe must reign. |
| 2) God is Love: and he, enfolding<br>All the world in one embrace;<br>With unfailing grasp is holding<br>Every child of every race.<br>And when human hearts are breaking<br>Under sorrow's iron rod,<br>Then they find that selfsame aching<br>Deep within the heart of God.               |  |

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## Prayer of Praise

Lord all creation bears witness to your glory; every corner of the world announces your praise; every tree, plant, creature, hill, mountain, sea or valley praises you our Creator God. Lord God, you are the Creator and Sustainer of everything we can see or hear, touch or taste. You are the origin of life and love; friendship and relationship. We come to praise you and offer you our worship. We rejoice that you have given to us the ability to enjoy what which you have made. You have given us an awareness of the specialness of creation. We rejoice that in the advent season we once more look back to remember your coming into your creation and to look forward to marking that event in celebration. God of Creation, Nature and all we rejoice that your Kingdom is big enough for all. We rejoice that your love is vast enough for each me. We rejoice that your grace is sufficient for all. **Amen.**

## Prayer of Confession

Lord, You created our world in the vastness of your universe. You created it from love to be a place of love and equity. You made us to be one, but we have chosen to be separated from you and from each other. Forgive us for creating those who have much and those who have little or nothing, rich and poor, privileged and deprived. Forgive us that all too often we do not think about what we have done to the beautiful creation you placed around us. Forgive us, and, by your grace help us to play our part in bringing healing to relationships with others and your creation. For we bring our prayers in the name of the One Christ who is the Saviour of the whole of creation. **Amen**

## Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and shouting. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp; the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing, everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

## StF 167 – Colours of day

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| 1) Colours of day dawn into the mind,<br>The sun has come up, the night is behind.<br>Go down in the city, into the street,<br>And let's give the message to the people we meet.                | 2) Go through the park, on into the town;<br>The sun still shines on, it never goes down.<br>The light of the world is risen again;<br>The people of darkness are needing a friend. |
| Ch) <i>So light up the fire and let the flame burn,<br/>Open the door, let Jesus return.<br/>Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow,<br/>Tell the people of Jesus, let His love show.</i> | 3) Open your eyes, look into the sky,<br>The darkness has come, the sun came to die.<br>The evening drawn on, the sun disappears,<br>But Jesus is living, His Spirit is near.       |

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## Reading: Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

## Sermon

It has taken a long time for many in the world to wake up to the issues of changing climate and global warming. It has been known about for over 100 years but it is only in the last 30 years that it seems that some realized that something needs to be done and even more recently that some of the general public have started to take some action collectively and individually. What about in the Church? What should we do? What could we do? Why should we do it?

For many in the Church the focus upon Jesus as our personal Saviour has dominated our thinking; we have recognized that God has love for us all as human beings. Yet, the God who in Jesus is personal Saviour, and is the God who loves and cares for us all as human beings is the God of all Creation and cares for all creation. The God who calls us to love our neighbour is the God who invited Adam and Eve to be stewards of Creation, to subdue it and invites humanity to continue that role. To subdue did not and does not mean to dominate and destroy it but to take care of it with the love of the creator.

The Isaiah reading so links into the New Testament reading and the person of John the Baptist that we may not fully read, with due attention, the whole of the passage. Isa 35:1ff - *The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and shouting. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.* Oh how different is the desert of today? It stretches further, more dry and barren land when what is needed is fertile and flourishing land. Human activity and farming styles have destroyed once fertile lands, reducing them to barren desert. God desires that the deserts blossom with abundance. Last month COP27 met in Egypt and a further strong warning was given that we are overheating the planet; action needs to be taken by all to stop disaster through the destroying of liveable habitat for animals, and indeed, for humanity itself.

The Jesus whose birth we shall once more be celebrating in worship in 2 weeks time is the one who was involved in the act of creation and entered into that creation and loves it all. Each year I look forward to reading the prologue to John's Gospel at some point during the Christmas weekend. It is a passage that reminds us of the eternal dimension of Christ.

*"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. 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."*

And as Jesus mentioned in the Gospels God cares "even" for the sparrows; what does that say to us?

*"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God."* (Luke 12:6)

In our self-focused way we take it to mean how much more valuable we are to God. Is not the message that God loves the whole of creation as well as humankind?

Last weekend a Nativity Set Festival was held at New Road Methodist Church. About 200 "sets" were on display. In many scenes a lot of animals were present. Animals are not mentioned directly in the Biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus but we put them into the Nativity Story; surely some were there. There are the animals around the feeding trough that became baby Jesus' crib. Maybe some sheep followed the shepherds. The wise men probably travelled on horses or camels. Did Mary travel on a Donkey?

I remember watching a School Nativity Play when I was in Lancashire and one of the children was dressed as a pig. Would you have noticed and wondered about it? When I was a teenager I attended a Christmas morning service and the minister was talking about how the animals in the stable might have reacted, the ox, the ass, the horse, the mouse, the pig. At which point Rev Frank Topping who was at the service called out "Derek, there would not have been a pig in a Jewish stable!" Maybe there would not have been a pig in the stable but the Bethlehem stable has room for all creatures and the whole cosmos: God loves every bit of it.

As people like David Attenborough reveals to a wide audience our lives are interwoven with the lives of the animals and plants which share this planet; their fate is bound up with our own.

In recent times at New Road, following a Lent Study started in Lent 2020 and finished in the summer of 2022, we have been looking at how we can be a more environmentally friendly church. Each year, in the October Property Schedules, there are questions about our use of Carbon based fuels, questions about what we have done to cut our CO2 emissions. At New Road we are looking to take these questions more seriously as we seek to become an Eco-Church, for there is room for the whole of nature in the stable

Which aspect of caring for the environment are you most passionate about?

In this advent season, as Christmas draws near, what can we do to show a care for all of God's Creation?

I leave you with some things to ponder.

- Choose wrapping paper carefully – is it recyclable? Is it from recycled paper?
- Choosing gifts – what is the packaging like?
- Do we buy gifts expecting one in return? What if the person we buy for feels obliged to buy one but it puts them into debt?
- Christmas crackers? Do they just contain small plastic objects that get thrown away?

In December Geff Harrison came and spoke to Dudley Wood Guild about his woodturning and wood art. He showed us some amazing pieces. I wonder how he would have felt if one of us had picked up a piece and deliberately broken it? How does God feel about how we are treating his wider creation? There is room for the whole of nature, the whole of the cosmos, at the stable. Let us learn to care for it all.

## StF 92 – Think of a world without any flowers

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| 1) Think of a world without any flowers,<br>Think of a wood without any trees,<br>Think of a sky without any sunshine,<br>Think of the air without any breeze:<br>We thank you, Lord, for flowers and<br>trees and sunshine;<br>We thank you, Lord, and praise your holy name. | 7) Think of a world without any worship,<br>Think of a God without his only Son,<br>Think of a cross without a resurrection,<br>Only a grave and not a victory won:<br>We thank you, Lord, for showing<br>us our Saviour;<br>We thank you, Lord, and praise your holy name.                                   |
| 2) Think of a world without any animals,<br>Think of a field without any herd,<br>Think of a stream without any fishes,<br>Think of a dawn without any bird:<br>We thank you, Lord, for all your living creatures;<br>We thank you, Lord, and praise your holy name.           | 8) Thanks to our Lord for being here among us,<br>Thanks be to him for sharing all we do,<br>Thanks for our church and all the love<br>we find here,<br>Thanks for this place and all its promise true:<br>We thank you, Lord, for life in all its richness;<br>We thank you, Lord, and praise your holy name |

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## Prayers of Intercession

To the broken world - Bring Healing  
To a warring world – Bring Peace  
To a hungry world – Bring food.  
To a dying world – Bring life  
To a homeless world – Bring Shelter  
To a world in despair – Bring calm  
To a world of confusion – Bring order  
To the world of today give hope of a better tomorrow. **Amen**

## The Lord's Prayer

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.**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are  
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

## StF 174 – Light a candle in a darkened room

- 1) Light a candle in a darkened place,  
In its flame see hope on every face,  
Christ our Saviour will be born,  
Heralding a brand new dawn, so let it burn.
- 2) In the darkness, see the coming light,  
Word of God speaks through the darkest night,  
Keep a watch, the time is near,  
Time for hope and not for fear, so let it burn.
- 3) Stepping through each page of history,  
Prophets contemplate this mystery,  
Celebrate the coming King,  
Words of joy and hope they bring, so let it burn.
- 4) In the desert now the waiting's done,  
Make things ready for your King, says John,  
See, his glory is revealed,  
And the hope for all is sealed, so let it burn.
- 5) Mary found true favour with the Lord,  
Yet she trembled at his strange reward,  
Knew this was the special One,  
Hope for many through God's Son, so let it burn.
- 6) Do not fear, today I bring good cheer,  
Jesus Christ, the Saviour now is here,  
God has lit his flame of love,  
Through his Son from Heaven above.  
So let it burn.

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## Blessing

There is one God, he gave us one earth. Go as God's people to love and care for neighbour, to care for God's creation, to tell all that there is room for them at the manger, at the stable, in God's Kingdom. And may the blessing of God, revealed to us in three ways, be with us in all we say and do. **Amen**