

22nd November 2020 – Morning Service

Rev Helen Croft

Call to Worship - Isaiah 9:2&6

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light - a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow...For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

God of surprising generosity and unexpected grace, we have come to witness a miracle, to prepare our hearts for a new invasion of your Light. We have come once again to open our souls and our lives to the divine birth and in this sacred moment we ask for your gentle Presence to captivate and challenge us.

Amen

StF 156 – From the breaking of the dawn

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| 1) From the breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word. | 3) When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
And I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
You will guide me with your hand
As I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
Every work begun in me,
So I'll stand on every promise of your word. |
| 2) When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
You remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word. | 4) Hope that lifts me from despair;
Love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word. |

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Prayers

We celebrate You and praise you, God of new beginnings and surprising opportunities, because you never cease to make yourself available to us. We appreciate You and thank you, God of unquenchable life and irrepressible grace, because you continue to offer us the resources of your Spirit. We love you and embrace you, God of unfailing compassion and constant companionship because you walk beside us and transform us into agents of love.

Forgive us, O Lord, when we seek to keep you to ourselves and shut others from your influence.

Forgive us, O Christ, when we wallow in our own weakness and take advantage of the weakness of others.

Forgive us, O Spirit, when we deny your friendship and withhold your compassion from others

[Silent Confession]

Heal us, restore and empower us, O God, we pray, for the sake of your kingdom which has broken into our world. **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.**

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us'). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Sermon

One week before Advent, a time where we prepare our hearts and lives to receive the Christ-Child and tell once again the story of how God's love came down to earth or in the Message translation, Jesus moving into the neighbourhood.

And yet, the story could have been so different. When we tell the Christmas story, we concentrate on Mary, Shepherds, Wise Men but very little is said or even made about Joseph - even if you look at the various liturgies of the Advent Ring - he doesn't seem to get a mention.

The Anglican Church celebrate Joseph of Nazareth as one of their Saints Days on 19 March and our prayers of intercession will be taken from their book of Common Worship but he makes only a token appearance at Christmas. The account from Matthew that was read earlier, appears in the revised lectionary readings for Year A on the fourth Sunday of Advent but if you look at the various commentaries about this week they don't dwell on Joseph but on the impending birth of Christ

As far as I can tell, there are in fact only 3 or 4 Biblical references to Joseph in Scripture. But for me, he plays a vital role in the story of Christmas because if Joseph didn't obey the voice of God, then things could have been very different.

Let me do some scene setting - Joseph and Mary were betrothed. Betrothed is not a word we use today. We normally say a couple are engaged. But in Biblical times, betrothal meant more than being engaged. The act of betrothal created a legal commitment to each other.

The way it would work, is that the fathers of the couple, in our case Mary and Joseph, would enter into discussions to see what each party would offer and bring to the relationship. For example, Mary might bring some money and/or some animals (this was more commonly known as a dowry) and Joseph in return would secure a house for Mary to make a home and possibly some land. After the fathers had contractually agreed what each person was responsible for, a legal ceremony would be initiated. After this ceremony, which is the betrothal, each party would return to their own family households for about a year, no fixed date was set (hence in the parable of the Ten Virgins they do not know the date when the Bridegroom will return) where the parties would prepare themselves for the marriage. Once the groom had completed his side of the contract and he is sure the bride is still a virgin, he goes to her family home and claims her, and consummates the marriage.

Joseph and Mary are in the process of preparing themselves for the marriage. But during this betrothal time, Joseph discovers Mary is pregnant with someone else's child. Now under the law given to Moses, he is allowed to divorce her and divorce her publicly. Mathew's Gospel tells us however, that Joseph is a righteous man. This implies that Joseph knew the law and upheld it but he was also an honourable man and so while wanting to do what was allowed under the law, he also wanted to avoid the disgrace not only he would endure, but especially Mary and her family. Therefore, he makes the decision to divorce Mary quietly. Joseph had made up his mind what to do in the situation but God had another solution. God appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him what was going on and it was okay to take Mary as his wife. I wonder what would have happened if Joseph hadn't followed Gods solution.....

IF Joseph had not taken Mary as his wife, it is unlikely they would have been in Bethlehem for the time of Jesus birth because it is due to Joseph's family they had gone there to be registered

IF Joseph had not taken Mary as his wife, Jesus would not have been born into the Davidic line because it is due to Joseph's family line that he is

IF Joseph had not taken Mary as his wife, it is probable that Jesus would have been killed by Herod with all the other boys. Instead of fleeing to Egypt because of Joseph receiving another dream from God

IF might only be a small two letter word, but it made a big difference to the story and the outcome.

I realise these are big **IFs** but there is an even bigger **BUT**. But because Joseph chose God's solution, things turned out different. God's solution probably caused Joseph to be the gossip at the watering well, people whispering behind his back in the market place that Mary his wife was carrying someone else's child. **BUT** Joseph was prepared to give up his reputation to follow God's solution and so, he became a catalyst for change.

In 1997 a Christian band called Delirious wrote a song entitled - History maker. The words are:

Is it true today that when people pray
Cloudless skies will break
Kings and queens will shake
Yes it's true and I believe it
I'm living for you

I'm gonna be a history maker in this land
I'm gonna be a speaker of truth to all mankind
I'm gonna stand, I'm gonna run
Into your arms, into your arms again
Into your arms, into your arms again

Is it true today that when people pray
We'll see dead men rise
And the blind set free
Yes it's true and I believe it
I'm living for you

Well it's true today that when people stand
With the fire of God, and the truth in hand
We'll see miracles, we'll see angels sing
We'll see broken hearts making history
Yes it's true and I believe it
We're living for you

Joseph became a history maker who allowed truth and justice to come forth through the life and words of Jesus. I believe the church has an opportunity to become history makers - to change the decline and see life but it's going to take boldness. It's going to take being whispered about in the community, it's going to mean standing up for injustice, it's going to mean calling things as God sees them and not as a human being sees them.

Joseph became the solution to a problem and the word of Christ has been proclaimed ever since. What about you and me? Are we going to become the solution? Are we prepared to let go of our egos and to step out of the way in order to allow God's solutions to break through in our towns and villages? Are we prepared to let God use us no matter what the cost? Are we prepared to become history makers for the Kingdom?

As we enter the season of Advent, and prepare for the birth of Christ. May we and all our agenda's step out of the way, so the love of God, which came down at the season we celebrate as Christmas and moved into the neighbourhood, be allowed to enter freely and bless others radically and unconditionally

StF 662 – Have you heard God's voice

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| 1) Have you heard God's voice;
Has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
Though the way be rough and narrow? | 3) In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships
start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless? |
| Ch) <i>Will you walk the path that will cost you much
And embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?</i> | 4) Will you watch the news with the eyes of
faith
And believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of
grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? |
| 2) Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent? | E) <i>We will walk the path that will cost us much
And embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
The disciples of tomorrow.</i> |

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Prayers of Intercession

At each '.....' please allow the Spirit to prompt you what to pray about at this time about the suggested theme in brackets.

Let us pray for the Church and God's world and, inspired by the example of Joseph, for grace to grow in faith and holiness and to follow ever more closely in the way of Christ. Joseph was the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah: may we value our family life at home and in the wider family of the Church.

We pray for [*the Church universal/local*]

L: Lord, hear us R: **Lord, graciously hear us**

Joseph was not afraid to take Mary as his wife when he learned that the child conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit: may we have no fear when we hear God's call to his service.

We pray for [*vocations to ministry/religious life/public service*]

L: Lord, hear us **R: Lord, graciously hear us**

Joseph was a righteous man and unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace: may we lead lives of integrity and be concerned for the reputation of others.

We pray for [*leaders/those in public life*]

L: Lord, hear us **R: Lord, graciously hear us**

Joseph named the child Jesus, the One who will save his people from their sins: may we make known to others the salvation he came to bring. We pray for those who have not heard the gospel of Christ.

L: Lord, hear us **R: Lord, graciously hear us**

Joseph protected the infant Jesus and his mother from the wrath of Herod: may we always seek to shield those who are weak and vulnerable.

We pray for [*the sick, suffering, helpless*]

L: Lord, hear us **R: Lord, graciously hear us**

Joseph took his family and returned to his native land: we remember those who have died recently. May we, with them and all the faithful departed, be welcomed to the banquet of eternal life.

L: Lord, hear us **R: Lord, graciously hear us**

Almighty God, we give you thanks for Joseph and for the whole company of your saints in glory, with whom in fellowship we join our prayers and praises; by your grace may we, like them, be made perfect in your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

StF 418 – We have a gospel to proclaim

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| 1) We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his glory, tell his worth. | 4) Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory. |
| 2) Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
Not in a royal house or hall,
But in a stable dark and dim,
The Word made flesh, a light for all. | 5) Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his church
To live for him, the Lamb who died. |
| 3) Tell of his death at Calvary:
Hated by those he came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross,
For all he loved his life he gave. | 6) Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth. |

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Blessing

In this moment of worship, we embrace your presence again, O God, and we offer you our love.

In this moment of prayer, we proclaim again your purpose for the world, O Saviour, and we offer you our resources.

In this moment of giving, we hear your call again, O Lord, and we offer ourselves.

Use us - all that we have and all that we are - to touch the world with the Christmas message:

God is love, God is with us. God will never leave us. **Amen**