

31st December – Morning Service

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Rev Chris Watson

Call to Worship

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let every heart prepare room for Jesus and his message. **Joy to the world, the Lord is come!**

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let all creation rejoice in God's presence, finding in their Source and Goal, the Light of life. **Joy to the world, the Lord is come!**

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let sorrow and sin be cleared as weeds before the harvest.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! We long for our world be ruled by truth and grace so that Your righteousness may be seen O God. **Joy to the world, the Lord is come!**

StF 330 – Joy to the world

1) Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare him room,

And heaven and nature sing,

And heaven and nature sing,

And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

3) He rules the world with truth and grace,

And makes the nations prove

The glories of his righteousness

And wonders of his love,

And wonders of his love,

And wonders, wonders of his love.

2) Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!

Let all their songs employ;

While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains

Repeat the sounding joy,

Repeat the sounding joy,

Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

Isaac Watts

Prayer of Praise and Confession

In this season of love, wonder, and awe, we come to worship You, Most High, to rejoice in Your presence amongst us, to sing Your praises, to rest awhile, to be led by You and to recharge our spiritual batteries.

In this season of giving, rest, and contentment, we come to listen to You, Lord Jesus, as you speak to us in word and song, reading and sermon, silence and stillness and in each other, that we may learn anew how to speak of You in our world. In this season of joy, silliness, and companionship, we come to be filled again by you, O Spirit, that filled with your dynamism, we may be better disciples in our world.

Forgive us, Eternal One, when we don't show the love, wonder, and awe that we should, when we find worship tedious not joyful, and when we turn away from Your loving energy. Forgive us, O Christ, when we ignore Your words to us, turn away from our kin in the Church, and refuse to be still in Your presence. Forgive us, Most Holy Spirit, when we reject Your love and presence, preferring our own ways rather than Yours. Forgive us, and give us time to change. **Amen**

Here is good news: God loves and accepts you! Jesus gave his life for you!

The Holy Spirit wraps you in the energy to change. So, accept the forgiveness that is yours, find the strength to forgive others and forgive yourself. **Amen.**

StF 175 – Light of the world

1) Light of the world, You stepped down
into darkness,
Opened my eyes, let me see.
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You.

2) King of all days, oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above,
Humbly You came to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

*Ch) So here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God:
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.*

*Br) And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.*

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Reading: Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3

I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the soil makes the young plant come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.

The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Reflection

This passage from Isaiah is part of a segment relating to prophecies about the return of those who had been taken into exile by the Babylonians. They had, over time, settled there in Babylon, they had raised families there but always with an eye to returning, one day, to their beloved homeland, the land of their Fathers. The succeeding generations, children and grandchildren were excited about the prospect of returning to this land they had heard so much about.

The return from exile was not the end of suffering, the city needed to be rebuilt, the nation needed to be re-established, ways of being faithful to God at home rather than in exile needed to be remembered. Life would never be the same again, not as before the exile or the life in exile, this life would be different. God promises that the desolate land and its people would flourish. The voice in the passage says they will not keep silent in the face of this promise, this 'Good News'.

The excitement of the return soon gave way to routine, to the everyday life involved in rebuilding, in living. For us the joy and excitement of Christmas Day soon goes, once the presents are opened, the dinner eaten, then the routine of tidying up, of everyday life comes back. But the joy of Christmas, the joy of the birth of Christ stays with us, this 'Good News' means that we too should not remain silent.

StF 202 – Hark the herald angels sing

- 1) Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim:
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'
- 2) Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel:
- Ch) *Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*
- 3) Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth:

Charles Wesley

Reading: Luke 2:22 - 40

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons'.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.'

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Reflection

Luke's Gospel was addressed to Theophilus and was written as an attempt to give an orderly account of the events surrounding the coming, life and death of Jesus. The Gospel was addressed to someone who was most likely a Gentile, a Roman official of some standing. Luke wants to set the record straight, to show that this new teaching is not some weird sect but rather is based on the precepts and concepts of Judaism. He is concerned in this passage to show that Mary and Joseph obeyed all the precepts of the Law after Jesus' birth. Luke tells us that Jesus, like all Jewish boys, was circumcised on the eighth day and named. He was presented to God at the Temple and Mary, in accordance with Leviticus 12(8), offered 2 doves for her purification after childbirth. Simeon recognises that this child is very special and is satisfied that now he can depart in peace. He also predicts that like the return from Exile in Isaiah it will not be straightforward, he sees a crisis that would pierce Mary's soul and cause many to rise and fall.

Simeon had been waiting to see, and had been promised that he would see, God's salvation. When he did he could not keep silent even though in some ways he pronounced a message of doom as well as glory. Simeon like Isaiah could not keep silent, the prophet could not be silent at the prospect of a return from exile even though it would not be easy. Simeon, after a lifetime of service to God, could not be silent when he finally saw God face to face, even though his speech had hard words for Mary to take in.

What does this mean for us? We have the gospels, we have our experiences. Can we remain silent about the good news of God's love for us and our fellow human beings? Can we remain silent in the light of Christmas? We need to declare what God has done for us at Christmas, at Easter and throughout the year.

StF 222 – Who would think that what was needed

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| 1) Who would think that what was needed
To transform and save the earth
Might not be a plan or army,
Proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision,
That a child might lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven,
Coming here on Christmas Day. | 3) Centuries of skill and science
Span the past from which we move,
Yet experience questions whether,
With such progress, we improve.
While the human lot we ponder,
Lest our hopes and humour fray,
God surprises earth with heaven,
Coming here on Christmas Day. |
| 2) Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,
Monarchs scorn and angels sing;
Such a think as none would reckon
Hosts a holy helpless thing;
Stable beasts and by-passed strangers
Watch a baby laid in hay:
God surprises earth with heaven,
Coming here on Christmas Day. | |

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Prayers of Concern

Eternal One, in these days of rest and recuperation we bring our world before You. We pray today for places in bondage to war, terror and inhumanity. For those on the move for a better life, for those living in precarious shelters and for those seeking to bring aid, medical care and hope. In particular, we pray for the people of Yemen, Ukraine and Russia, Palestine and Israel...[*Silence*]

Prince of peace, in these days of war we pray for all who seek to make peace: those who negotiate behind the scenes, those who work for the United Nations Organisation, and the Red Cross and Crescent bringing relief and neutrality to a polarised world.

We pray too for political leaders as America and the UK head towards elections; that truth may be spoken, trust our public life may be increased and wisdom granted to us as we vote....[*Silence*]

Holy Spirit, we pray for Your Church that we may understand our faith and be emboldened to proclaim it, that we may continue to be freed from the bondage to sin and decay that drags us down and be willing to help emancipate others, that we may be filled with Your compassion and be willing to share it....[*Silence*]

Holy Trinity of Love, we remember before You all whom we love and worry about....[*Silence*]

We join all our prayers together as we pray as Jesus taught saying,

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 205 – It came upon the midnight clear

- 1) 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, goodwill to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King!'
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.
- 2) 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.
- 3) 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!
- 4) For lo, the days are hastening on,
To prophets shown of old,
When with the ever-circling years
Shall come the time foretold,
When the new heaven and earth shall own
The Prince of Peace their King,
And all the world repeat the song
Which now the angels sing.

Edmund Hamilton Sears

Blessing

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people;

A light to reveal you to the nations

and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.