

3rd January 2021 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

Opening Prayer

Lord, we live in a world of change. Every day is filled with uncertainty. We are surrounded by the twists and turns of life and we often feel we have little control over the things that happen to us. Lord, we come into your presence. We come to find ourselves, to find our way, to find our hope. We come to you for in Christ you first came to us. **Amen**

StF 743 – Come let us join our cheerful songs

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne;
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one. | 3) Jesus is worthy to receive
Honour and power divine;
And blessings, more than we can give,
Be, Lord, for ever thine. |
| 2) 'Worthy the Lamb that died, they cry,
'To be exalted thus!'
'Worthy the Lamb!' our lips reply,
'For he was slain for us.' | 4) Let all creation join in one
To bless the sacred name
Of him that sits upon the throne,
And to adore the Lamb. |

Isaac Watts CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Adoration

God of beginnings we rejoice that we can be in your presence.

The beginning and the end of all is known by you who constantly offer to us new beginnings in our life. From the moment of our birth we have more new beginnings with each new day, each new friendship, each new discovery, each new encounter with your creation. When we get things wrong you offer forgiveness for our failings and the opportunity to begin again and grow deeper in our relationship with you as we discover more of your grace.

We praise you for the way you have brought us to this moment, through times of pain and of joy, disappointment and celebration. We praise you for your constant love; encouragement and strengthening you give to us in our walk with Jesus. He is our light, our guide, our shepherd and friend; may we in our lives declare your love that others too shall be enabled to worship and praise you and in so doing find fulfilment and joy in their daily living.

Prayer of Confession and Commitment

We would let go of the past.

Eternal God, Creator, Son and Spirit, at the start of this new-year, we would seek to leave the past behind us and let go of all within it that will hold us back in being faithful to your calling this year. Help us to lay down our failures, guilt and shame that we might lift up our eyes to you and look to the future with in confidence of your grace. In the stillness of this moment we pause and think of our past, the good and the bad, hear our confession and forgive our sin.

May the assurance of your presence strengthen our resolve to listen to your call, follow where you lead and achieve that which you call us to for the growth of your Kingdom. Let our lives be dedicated to bring peace and joy into the lives of those around us, near and far by the grace of Jesus living within and flowing from us. **Amen**

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

StF 513 – Take this moment

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Take this moment, sign, and space;
Take my friends around;
Here among us make the place
Where your love is found. | 4) Take the little child in me,
Scared of growing old;
Help me here to find my worth
Made in Christ's own mould. |
| 2) Take the time to call my name,
Take the time to mend
Who I am and what I've been,
All I've failed to tend. | 5) Take my talents, take my skills,
Take what's yet to be;
Let my life be yours, and yet,
Let it still be me. |
| 3) Take the tiredness of my days,
Take my past regret,
Letting your forgiveness touch
All I can't forget. | |

John L Bell & Graham Maule © 1989 WGRG Iona Community CCL No. 515642

Reading: John 1:1-5, 14-18

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. (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Reflection

At the beginning of a new year I chose two readings for this service. You are likely to have heard them near the end of last year at a carol service; the number of the year changes but history continues, we live with the effects of the past in the present. We live with the salvation offered by Jesus in the past in the present and on into the future.

The beginning of a New Year has happened and we are at the first Sunday of this Year. Many may have thought that they would be in church congregations this morning and are disappointed not to be. We are now in Tier 4 and are guided to close our places of worship for the care of self and neighbour. Others were always going to be at home, or elsewhere, unable to be with friends and fellow worshippers for different reasons.

Worship is the way to begin a New Year in whatever form it can be. In the last reflection I emailed out, and posted on the Circuit Facebook page of 2020, I made reference to the Watch-night Service that was part of Methodism, and other church traditions, in the past. It now seems to be less frequently observed. After reading my reflection one person emailed me with her good memories of such events in her past.

To begin a new year in worship is the right way of doing it. This morning I should have been leading a Covenant Service in Gigmill. The leadership of the congregation decided not to be open today with concern for their health and the well being of others before Christmas, a decision I support them in. So when a request came out for leading the online service I volunteered. The Covenant Service, a service of promise and commitment, is a good service of worship to share in at the beginning of a year and there is a sadness it will not be so for many this year.

Regardless of limitations we can worship be it in the quiet of our own space, in a community of fellow believers or using technology that some have available to join in online-worship with others. This time last year I had not heard of Zoom or Jitsi and very few of us would have joined in online worship. In springtime there was the beginning of a new way of doing things in the Vale of Stour Circuit and in many other church congregations. We have tried new ways of worship and discovered there is more than one way of being Church. As we go into the next few months we shall remember how things have been and seek to take the positive with us on into the forever-new future.

As we have entered this New Year there is hope from the growing availability of a vaccine that will make a huge difference to the way we have been living allowing a social mixing and encounters to happen with more freedom as things had been prior to this Covid season.

But where is our true hope? Our true hope is in the eternal one who revealed himself as a baby lying in a manger ready to be worshipped. At the beginning of the year we worship. Those who came and worshipped that infant went away changed by the experience – the shepherds went away rejoicing. The Wise Men went off in a different direction changed by their experience and reassessing their assumptions; the child was not born where they had expected him to be. In worship we encounter the living God and in such encounter change happens. In encounter with God our assumptions can be challenged and changed, our attitude changed and our love grow both for God and for others.

In many a crime drama we might have heard something along the lines of “Wherever there is interaction part of the both are left behind” and so the forensic officers get to work. Forensic scientists look for the sign of the presence of another at a crime scene whilst they are wrapped up in paper suits to stop contaminating the scene themselves. One needs to be careful of taking any analogy too far but when we encounter God we are touched and transformed by his presence. But is God changed by encounter with me? I leave the deep theological and philosophical thinkers amongst you to ponder further on that one.

As we explore our relationship with God in worship this year, wherever it might be, may we be open in each and every encounter to be touched and transformed by the living God. As Charles Wesley would put it "Changed from Glory unto Glory".

From his fullness we have all received, Grace upon Grace, amazing, transforming grace, undeserved love. In this act of worship may we commit ourselves to be open to that grace, day by day by day as the year goes by allowing each act of worship to truly be an encounter with the one Living God revealed to us in Jesus healing, restoring, transforming us into his likeness and to be the people we were created to be.

StF 470 – Lord for the years

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Lord, for the years
Your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us,
Cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us,
Pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years,
We bring our thanks today. | 4) Lord, for our world,
When we disown and doubt Him,
Loveless in strength
And comfortless in pain;
Hungry and helpless,
Lost indeed without Him,
Lord of the world,
We pray that Christ may reign. |
| 2) Lord, for that Word,
The Word of life which fires us,
Speaks to our hearts
And sets our souls ablaze.
Teaches and trains,
Rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the Word,
Receive Your people's praise. | 5) Lord, for ourselves;
In living power remake us,
Self on the cross
And Christ upon the throne.
Past put behind us,
For the future take us,
Lord of our lives,
To live for Christ alone. |
| 3) Lord, for our land,
In this our generation,
Spirits oppressed by
Pleasure, wealth and care;
For young and old,
For commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land,
Be pleased to hear our prayer. | |

Timothy Dudley-Smith © 1969 Timothy Dudley-Smith CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Let us give thanks at the start of this new-year for the many ways in which our lives are supported day by day. By familiar shops and faces on the street; postal-workers and rubbish collectors; street-cleaners and office workers; teachers and medics, factory employees and those who help us in time of leisure.

We give thanks for warm homes and cupboards within food in them.

We give thanks for friends and neighbours, new challenges and past achievements.

We give thanks to you O Lord and praise your holy name.

We give thanks especially for those we love, whose loyalty we depend upon, whose faults and failings we forgive and whose acceptance of our faults and failings we wonder at, whose daily presence we can so easily take for granted.

For those who are most precious to us, wherever they may be, we give thanks to you O Lord and praise your holy name. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

L: Lord, arise and shine

R: *Make known your glory upon the earth*

God of wonder and light it was a star that led the wise men to worship your Son, May we, as part of your church, be a beacon of light to draw people into your presence.

L: Lord, arise and shine

R: *Make known your glory upon the earth*

God of power and might the news of the birth of Christ caused fear amongst the political leaders may an awareness of Christ transform the hearts and minds of political leaders to seek your Kingdom values.

L: Lord, arise and shine

R: *Make known your glory upon the earth*

God of mystery and wisdom in Jesus the purpose of your love was revealed; may we in the way we live in home and community reveal your love to others that they too may share in joy.

L: Lord, arise and shine

R: *Make known your glory upon the earth*

God of healing and restoration we pause and bring before you those who we know who need your healing and restoration through personal contact or through the media around us.

L: Lord, arise and shine

R: *Make known your glory upon the earth*

We lay before you those who have died in faith, which has transformed our life, and those who have died in fear that they would find peace.

L: Lord, arise and shine

R: *Make known your glory upon the earth*

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 67 – This, this is the God we adore

1) This, this is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,
Whose love is as great as his power,
And neither knows measure nor end:

2) 'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past,
And trust him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart CCL No. 515642

Blessing

May the blessing of the one who was, who is, and who is to come be upon us all, redeeming our past, filling our present and lighting up our future, in the name of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen