

## A service for 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2026 (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 96 verses 1 to 3

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written in 2001 by Revd. Tim Hughes, who, with his wife Rachel, are senior pastors at Gas Street Church in the centre of Birmingham and have founded Worship Central, a worship training and resources centre. Tim was born in High Wycombe, but moved to Harborne, Birmingham as a teenager when his father became vicar of St. John's church. We shall sing hymn number 175, 'Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness'.*

**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. *Chorus:*

***So here I am to worship,***

***Here I am to bow down,***

***Here I am to say that you're my God,***

***And you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,***

***Altogether wonderful to me.***

**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. *Chorus:*

**3. 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..... *Chorus:*

© Tim Hughes

### **Let us pray**

Heavenly Father, we are indeed here to worship and adore you, for you are the Creator of life throughout the universe, yet despite your boundless power and wisdom you love sinful human beings so much you shared our mortal life as Christ Jesus. He set aside his might and glory to come as a helpless baby, in humble Bethlehem, born to ordinary parents. As he grew among common people like us, Jesus shared our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears, our trials and temptations, yet he did so without sinning, becoming the pattern of how you want us to live. By his death and resurrection our Saviour triumphed over sin and death for our sakes, offering a new covenant of love and faith for all who will acknowledge him.

We thank you, Lord, for all that you have done for us and given to us throughout our lives. Thank you for this amazing, beautiful and self-sustaining world on which we live, though we know we have not treated with the care it requires. Help us to make changes in our lifestyles that mean forthcoming generations will have a planet worth inheriting. Loving Lord, we reflect upon the good things we have received from you: things that have brought us pleasure; special people who have enriched our days; experiences that have left us powerful memories and challenges that have added zest to our lives.

Amazing God, your love for us is beyond our understanding, for we know we fall short of what you would have us be. We confess that we have not loved you wholeheartedly, nor have we loved other people as we would like them to love us. Merciful Lord, for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do, forgive us in Jesus' name, as we repent.

Gracious, loving God, we believe that you hear and answer all prayers and, trusting that in your great goodness and mercy you have pardoned us, teach us to serve you as you desire, so that, by helping and loving others in Jesus' lovely name, we may bring you honour and glory for as long as we live. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer that Jesus taught us.***

**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.**

***The author of our second hymn was James Montgomery, whose parents were Scots Moravian missionaries in Barbados. Both died of yellow fever when James was young, so he had to return to a strict boarding school in Yorkshire. James hated school, so he was set to work in the school bakery, but from this unpromising start he became the owner and editor of "The Sheffield Iris", a radical newspaper which campaigned for the disfranchised and downtrodden here and abroad. James was held in such high regard by the time he died, Sheffield Corporation gave him a public funeral and erected a statue of him. We shall sing hymn number 228, 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed.'***

1. Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
Great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed,  
His reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
To set the captives free,  
To take away transgression  
And rule in equity.

2. He comes, with succour speedy,  
To those who suffer wrong;  
To help the poor and needy,  
And bid the weak be strong;  
To give them songs for sighing,  
Their darkness turn to light,  
Whose souls, condemned and dying,  
Were precious in his sight.

3. He shall come down like showers  
Upon the fruitful earth;  
Love, joy and hope, like flowers,  
Spring in his path to birth;  
Before him, on the mountains,  
Shall peace the herald go;  
And righteousness, in fountains, / From hill to valley flow.

**4. Kings shall fall down before him  
And gold and incense bring;  
All nations shall adore him,  
His praise all people sing;  
To him shall prayer unceasing  
And daily vows ascend,  
His kingdom still increasing,  
A kingdom without end.**

**5. O'er every foe victorious,  
He on his throne shall rest;  
From age to age more glorious,  
All-blessing and all-blest.  
The tide of time shall never  
His covenant remove;  
His name shall stand for ever,  
His changeless name of Love.**

© James Montgomery (1771 – 1854)

***We come now to our prayers of intercession for neighbours nearby and far away.  
Let us pray.***

Almighty God, Christ Jesus came as the True Light for this sin-darkened, broken, yet beautiful world, for which we pray now. In recognition of your boundless grace to us, we offer ourselves to play what part we can, however small help build your kingdom here by reaching out to neighbours who are in distress or need. However, we know how limited our powers are, so we turn to you, our gracious heavenly Father, to whom nothing is impossible. Move the hearts and minds of people who wield greater power and influence to bring about much-needed change. Nevertheless, help us to play our part to build your kingdom by our discipleship. Let us help address the issue of poverty by supporting the work done by organizations like food banks and the Salvation Army who serve the poor and vulnerable.

May our support for Christian Aid, All We Can and other relief organizations help address the grievous poverty in the Developing World, besides countries left stricken by natural disasters. We pray for people in the Caribbean and Filipinos who are recovering from a recent hurricane and typhoons, for Californians and Sumatrans who have experienced severe floods. May they swiftly receive the help they need to rebuild their damaged properties and disrupted lives. Grant them courage and resilience to deal with the effects of these disasters and to rebuild what they have lost.

Jesus came to bring healing and comfort to the marginalised and ill whom he met, so we pray for healing of everybody we know who is sick in body, mind or spirit. Grant them wellbeing, hope and peace not only through the professional care and support they are given, but by feeling your presence during their time of need. We know this time of year is especially difficult for many who have been bereaved, for seeing others' celebrations exacerbates their grief and loss. It is a painful time, too for the lonely, for the estranged and for those who feel undervalued or unloved. Help us to be sensitive to the needs of people around us, so we can befriend and support them. In a period of silence, we pray for everyone known who need your help at this time

..... Loving Lord, hold them in the warmth of your love, so they experience comfort, hope and peace.

Sovereign Lord, we pray for the victims of war and man's inhumanity to man. We pray for peace in the many lands where fighting mars the lives of ordinary people,

especially Ukraine and the Holy Land, or where people face terrorism, oppression and discrimination. Guide the leaders of the world to seek justice and mercy in their dealings and to resist the temptation to use force in order to impose their will on others. Teach them instead to see value in negotiation and compromise when disagreements arise.

Lord of all, may your Holy Spirit fill, guide and inspire your church, not only here, but churches in local Circuits and, indeed, the World Church. Unite us in love and service, so we may proclaim good news in words and actions. May the Spirit heal our divisions, so we may serve you in love and unity. Help us all to bear the Christ-light faithfully in this sin-darkened world so that our actions and our words proclaim your transformative, redemptive love to all-comers.

Abba, Father, bless us our families and our friends as we answer our call to serve you. May the Holy Spirit make a Christmas in our hearts every day, not just one day each year and may our joy of knowing how dearly you love us inspire us to let the light of your love shine through everything we do, so we honour you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Our next hymn was written by Revd. Carl Daw, an American Episcopal priest and Curator of Hymnological Collections and Adjunct Professor of Hymnology at Boston University School of Theology. I have asked that we sing it to the tune “Aberystwyth” which ought to be familiar and so let you concentrate upon the words. With no more ado, let us sing hymn number 189, ‘Wild and lone the prophet’s voice’.*

**1. Wild and lone the Prophet’s voice**

Echoes through the desert still,  
Calling us to make a choice,  
Bidding us to do God’s will:  
“Turn from sin and be baptized;  
Cleanse your heart and mind and soul.  
Quitting all the sin you prized,  
Yield your life to God’s control.”

**2. “Bear the fruit repentance sows:**

Lives of justice, truth and love.  
Trust no other claim than those;  
Set your heart on things above.  
Soon the Lord will come in power,  
Burning clean the threshing-floor;  
Then will flames the chaff devour;  
Wheat alone shall fill God’s store.”

**3. With such preaching stark and bold**

John proclaimed salvation near,  
And his timeless warnings hold  
Words of hope to all who hear.  
So we dare to journey on,  
Led by faith through ways untrod,  
Till we come at last like John  
To behold the Lamb of God.

© Carl P. Daw Jr. (Born 1944)

The Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 42 verses 1 to 9

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.”

This is what God the LORD says—he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.” Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn by the long-lived Methodist Minister and prolific hymn-writer, Fred Pratt Green. Hymn number 233, ‘When Jesus came to Jordan’.*

**1. When Jesus came to Jordan**

To be baptised by John,  
He did not come for pardon,  
But as his Father’s Son.  
He came to share repentance  
With all who mourn their sins,  
To speak the vital sentence  
With which Good News begins.

**2. He came to share temptation,**

Our utmost woe and loss,  
For us and our salvation  
To die upon the cross.  
So when the Dove descended  
On him, the Son of Man,  
The hidden years had ended,  
The age of grace began.

**3. Come, Holy Spirit, aid us**

To keep the vows we make;  
This very day invade us,  
And every bondage break.  
Come, give our lives direction,  
The gift we covet most:  
To share the resurrection  
That leads to Pentecost.

© Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

**Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 3 verses 13 to 17**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying,

“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

Jesus replied,

“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that

moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Amen.

**Sermon: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17**

The first prophet Isaiah preached in Judea between 740 and 700BC, during which time the Northern Kingdom, Samaria, was defeated by the Assyrians in 721BC. Isaiah warned the Judeans against believing in their own abilities, rather than on God's saving grace. Many rejected the prophet's words, that a great disaster would result from their apostasy, claiming that nothing bad could befall Jerusalem, as Solomon's temple lay within its walls. However, the first Isaiah's warnings were vindicated in 587BC, when Jerusalem was laid waste, the temple plundered and destroyed before the surviving Jews were led into exile in Babylon. The second Isaiah wrote during the time of exile in Babylon and our reading shows another vision of God's nature. If the first was anger and punishment, the second is gracious love and salvation which follows. Isaiah foresaw the coming of God's anointed, the Messiah, of whom he said, "**Here is my servant, whom I strengthen—the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my Spirit, and he will bring justice to every nation.**" The Messiah would be gentle and humble, not promoting himself loudly with great pomp, like most Near Eastern rulers, nor would he treat the weak and powerless with contempt. "**He will not break off a bent reed or put out a flickering lamp.**" Instead, he would establish justice on the earth, offering salvation to everyone.

When the first group of Judeans were allowed to return to Jerusalem in 538BC, some Jews felt that King Cyrus of Persia was perhaps the Messiah, but further conquests and oppression by Greeks and Romans led most Jews to look for Isaiah's Messiah once more, so John the Baptist's cry, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**" generated hope for many that, after six centuries, the Holy One was coming. It is most likely that John was a member of a priestly sect called the Essenes, who lived at Qumran, by the Dead Sea and devoted themselves to God in monastic communities. John, however, began to call Jews to repent and baptised them in the River Jordan to symbolise the washing away of sins and the granting of a fresh start. John's call was urgent, for the day of the Lord was imminent. He declared, '**After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.**' Repentance means more than simply saying '**Sorry!**' The Baptist would have used the Hebrew "**Shub**", which means to return to God's Covenant, to turn one hundred and eighty degrees from sin towards the path the Lord wants us to follow. John's baptism symbolised a new start with God for those who turned, but water was only a preparation for the baptism that Christ's followers receive, for through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we enter a relationship so close to God that we may call him '**Abba', 'Daddy'.**

Imagine John the Baptist's amazement when Jesus came to the River Jordan to be baptized. Nonplussed, he tried to hinder him, saying, "**I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?**" In other words, John recognised that Jesus had never sinned, so he did not need purification. Indeed, Jesus was supremely qualified to offer sinners forgiveness and the Baptist included himself among them. So why did Jesus insist on being baptised? When he told John, "**Let it be so for now. For in this way we shall do all that God requires,**" Jesus gave us a clue. He was not fulfilling the demands of Torah, for baptism was not a requirement for repentance. Instead, Jesus was identifying himself with flawed humanity, who needed to change their ways and to

be baptized into new life. In other words, Jesus was showing that he is not just God, but **Immanuel**, God with us, God alongside us, **both fully human and fully divine**.

Part of the significance of the baptism lies in Jesus' authentication from heaven: the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, giving him the power and wisdom to fulfil God's plan for our salvation and God's declaration, "**This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased**," echoed Isaiah's words and verified for John the Baptist that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The other significant feature of the baptism is Christ's humility. He was not too proud to identify himself with sinners; instead, he did his Father's will. In that respect Jesus challenges us, his disciples, to answer his call, whether or not our calling seems beyond our abilities, or does not suit our own desires, or is inconvenient. We are called to set aside worldly values in order to serve Christ, to reach out to those who society deems of no account, rather than to court the wealthy and influential, just as Jesus did in his earthly ministry.

Let us resolve to do God's will, not only to the best of our ability, but in the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives within us as our comforter, wisdom and might. Above all, let us remember and joyfully honour the words of our **Covenant Prayer**: '**I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace. Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose. Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.**

*Our closing hymn was written by John Bell and the late Graham Maule of the Iona Community. John Bell is a frequent contributor to Radio 4's "Thought for Today" and believes in a social ministry. Their hymns are usually set to old Scots ballads, but this is sung to a French carol melody, 'Noel Nouvelet'. We sing hymn number 251, 'Jesus Christ is waiting'.*

**1. Jesus Christ is waiting,**

**Waiting in the streets;**

**No one is his neighbour,**

**All alone he eats.**

**Listen, Lord Jesus,**

**I am lonely, too:**

**Make me, friend or stranger,**

**Fit to wait on you.**

**2. Jesus Christ is raging,**

**Raging in the streets,**

**Where injustice spirals**

**And real hope retreats.**

**Listen, Lord Jesus,**

**I am angry, too:**

**In the kingdom's causes,**

**Let me rage with you.**

**3. Jesus Christ is healing,**

**Healing in the streets,**

**Curing those who suffer,**

**Touching those he greets.**

**Listen, Lord Jesus,**

**I have pity, too:**

**Let my care be active,**

**Healing, just like you.**

**4. Jesus Christ is dancing,**

**Dancing in the streets,**

**Where each sign of hatred**

**He, with love, defeats.**

**Listen, Lord Jesus,**

**I should triumph, too:**

**Where good conquers evil,**

**Let me dance with you.**

**5. Jesus Christ is calling,**

**Calling in the streets,**

**'Who will join my journey?**

**I will guide their feet.'**

**Listen, Lord Jesus,**

**Let my fears be few:**

**Walk one step before me;**

**I will follow you.**

© John L. Bell (B 1949) & Graham Maule (B 1958 - 2019)

***Benediction.***

May the joy of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, the worship of the wise men and the peace of the Christ child be yours, not only at Christmastide but always. May Christ, who by his birth united heaven and earth, fill you with joy and peace. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all and those we love for evermore. Amen.