

At Home Service 13th December 2020

A gathering prayer with candle lighting

Magnificat! Magnificat! Gathered today, in many places, we are together in spirit on this joyful Sunday of Advent to celebrate the light that we light, to mark that hope is always present among us, even when we do not see it. Let us find hope and strength in this company of friends, lifting up our voices in unity in a great song of praise to the one who is always with us. Amen.

Call to worship

Come, rejoice before God. Honour the name of the Most High.

God has looked on his people, and brought us to be a people of light celebrating the light.

All souls magnify God: blessed is the name of God for ever.

Lift up holy hands and be glad. Amen.

Singing the Faith 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.	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.
	<i>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.</i>		<i>So here I am to worship ... 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. So here I am to worship ...</i>

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Prayers

I may be weary or downhearted. Still I say: let my heart be glad for God is always here. I approach God with confidence, because God has always been with me. Let my heart be glad! Amen.

God, you hovered over chaos, like a brooding hen, bringing order over chaos.

But I – through thought, deed, misdeed and omission – have quenched the spirit of life that you give me. I have turned my face away. And now, I turn my face back to you, light of all light, God of all gods, and ask for the light of your life to lift me again. Bring me out of chaos into the order of creation, for your name's sake, and for the sake of your goodness that surrounds me. Amen.

Jesus, son of God and son of Mary, you came among us, baptizing with fire and light, calling all to the true vocation of humanity: to reflect the glory of the creator. I thank you for your work among us, how you gathered, how you spoke, how you ate and drank, how you left your Spirit to lift us up and hold us in the light. I praise you, because you came to us, and keep coming to us, because of your great love. Amen.

Isaiah 61.1-4,8-11

The servant of the Lord said: ¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴They shall build up the ancient

ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. ⁸For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. ¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

1 Thessalonians 5.16-24

My brothers and sisters, ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; ²¹hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Singing the Faith 528 Pray without ceasing, pray – Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

1	Pray, without ceasing, pray, your captain gives the word; his summons cheerfully obey, and call upon the Lord: to God your every want in instant prayer display; pray always; pray, and never faint; pray, without ceasing, pray!	2	In fellowship, alone, to God with faith draw near, approach his courts, besiege his throne with all the powers of prayer: go to his temple, go, nor from his altar move; let every house his worship know, and every heart his love.
3	Pour out your souls to God, and bow them with your knees, and spread your hearts and hands abroad, and pray for Zion's peace; your guides and kindred bear for ever on your mind; extend the arms of mighty prayer, and grasp all humankind.		

John 1.6-8,19-28

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' ²¹And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' ²²Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' ²³He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' ²⁶John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Reflection

Who are you? A question asked of John the Baptist as the Religious authorities sought to understand his ministry amongst the people. Are you the Messiah? No! Are you Elijah returned to us? No! Are you the prophet? No! So, who are you then? 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness'. This is a question to John the Baptist but it is also a question asked of Jesus and it is a question he asks of his disciples 'who do

people say that I am?’ and then ‘who do you say that I am?’ It is a question asked by Saul on the road to Damascus, ‘who are you Lord?’ And it is a question that should be on our lips as we prepare for Christmas. As we prepare so we should again ask ourselves who Jesus is as far as we are concerned. The reading from John’s Gospel points us towards an understanding of who Jesus is because, if John is ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’ then the one who follows is the Messiah. John the Baptist makes it clear that he is present with them as the authorities question him, that he has much more power than John has (with the implied ‘baptism of the spirit’) and that he is the Messiah who sets out on the road prepared by ‘the voice’.

John the Baptist and John the gospel writer both point to Jesus as Messiah.

I wish that people today would ask who Jesus is and what difference he might make to their life. That they might see Advent as a time for asking such questions in the build up to celebrating the birth of Jesus. Instead the focus is on trees and tinsel, presents and food, drinking and merriment. Christmas has become a winter festival rather than the celebration of a birth of a man who has changed and can continue to change this world. Perhaps the question for this year is ‘what is Christmas about?’ or ‘why do we celebrate Christmas?’ These are questions that we as people of faith should be asking ourselves as well, along with the ‘who is Jesus’ one. If we really believe that ‘Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God’ then that changes the motivation for our Christmas celebrations, it changes the focus about what is important. If we believe that Jesus is God with us, then he is with us as we celebrate on Christmas Day. And he can be with all who call on His name in a very real way bringing freedom and peace into hearts and minds.

Let us remember that John prepared the way for the coming of Jesus through his actions with the ‘common’ people not with the authorities. Our task is the same – to prepare the way for Jesus to be known by all who might want to meet him. That starts with our care and concern for neighbours in the broadest sense of that word.

A personal prayer

In my moments of weariness, or meekness, or pressure, I know God is here. In my moments of pride, I know God is here. In my moments of demand, I know God is here. God is here, always, already, at once. Holding, sustaining and creating a new creation, in me, in us, in all. Amen.

Mission Praise 119 El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai

El Shaddai, el Shaddai

El-elyon na Adonai

Age to age you're still the same

By the power of the name

El Shaddai, el Shaddai

Erkamka na Adonai

We will praise and lift you high

El Shaddai

El Shaddai, el Shaddai

El-elyon na Adonai

Age to age you're still the same

By the power of the name

El Shaddai, el Shaddai

Erkamka na adonai

We will praise and lift you high

El Shaddai

Through your love and through the ram
You saved the son of Abraham
Through the power of your hand
Turned the sea into dry land
To the outcast on her knees
You were the God who really sees
And by your might
You set your children free

Through the years you've made it clear
That the time of Christ was near
Though the people couldn't see
What Messiah ought to be
Though Your word contained the plan
they just could not understand
Your most awesome work was done
Through the frailty of your son

El Shaddai, el Shaddai

Intercessions

God of the past, the present and the future, I pray for the world, where nothing stays the same: governments come and go; wars are fought and peace treaties signed; rains fall on drought-stricken lands; the earth quakes, the rivers flood. (I think of . . .)

I pray for the world that is always changing, that in the midst of change, humankind might find you, the unchanging God, at work, and find reasons for hope and joy.

God of the past, the present and the future, I pray for the church, where nothing stays the same: ways of worship come and go; beliefs are challenged by new ways of thinking; the Spirit constantly renews your people; we learn to live and share with one another. (I think of . . .)

I pray for the church that is always changing, that in the midst of change, humankind might see you, the unchanging God, at work, and find reasons for hope and joy.

God of the past, the present and the future, I pray for my life, where nothing stays the same: happiness comes and goes; I experience and learn and grow; unexpected events alter everything; I suffer illness and loss. (I think of . . .)

I pray for lives that are always changing, that in the midst of change, each might find you, the unchanging God, at work in them, and find reasons for hope and joy. In the name of Jesus, who came to change the world.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Offering and prayer of dedication

God of all goodness and grace, receive the gifts I offer; and grant that my whole life may give you glory and praise; through Christ my Lord. **Amen.**

Singing the Faith 193 Born in the night

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|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Born in the night,
Mary's Child,
a long way from your home;
coming in need,
Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room. | 2 | Clear shining light,
Mary's Child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world,
Mary's Child,
dawn on our darkened day. |
| 3 | Truth of our life,
Mary's Child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true,
Mary's Child,
go to your cross of wood. | 4 | Hope of the world,
Mary's Child,
you're coming soon to reign;
King of the earth,
Mary's Child,
walk in our streets again. |

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Blessing

I go in peace: aiming at what is best for all, always being joyful, praying continually, giving thanks, whatever happens. May God, the God of peace, make me holy through and through and keep me sound in spirit, soul and body.

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon me and remain with me always. **Amen.**

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