

27th December 2020 At Home Service

Call to worship

Let us all, young and old, be like Anna and Simeon – nurtured in the place of prayer, and looking to the world for the signs of God’s presence. Held together by this beloved truth, we each turn together to worship the one who calls us all in prayer and practice towards the works of love. Amen.

Singing the Faith 206 It was on a starry night

It was on a starry night when the hills were bright,
earth lay sleeping, sleeping calm and still;
then in a cattle shed, in a manger bed
a boy was born, King of all the world.

*And all the angels sang for him,
the bells of heaven rang for him;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.
And all the angels sang for him,
the bells of heaven rang for him;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.*

Soon the shepherds came that way, where the baby lay,
and were kneeling, kneeling by his side.
And their hearts believed once more, for the peace of all;
for a boy was born, King of all the world.

And all the angels sang for him.....

Joy Webb (b. 1932). Words and Music: © Salvationist Publishing and Supplies Ltd, Administered by Song Solutions CopyCare, 14 Horsted Square, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 1QG. <www.songsolutions.org> Used by permission.

A gathering prayer

As Mary and Joseph went on the pilgrimage of faith to Jerusalem, so I, too, have come on a pilgrimage of faith today, to the place where I worship. Meet with me, O God, as I come before you, and open my eyes to see the eternal truths all around me, calling me into love and more love and things that are everlasting. Amen.

A prayer of approach

I come with all I have – body, frailty, energy – and I approach you, who welcomes all, knowing that you sustain your people at all ages, and in all ages, calling us all to love. Amen.

A prayer of confession

The heavens and seas proclaim your glory. But we have polluted the skies and clogged the seas.

Young and old together show the beauty of God.

But we have made idols of youth and made age seem shameful.

Forgive us, God, for our sins against the earth and our sins against each other.

We move – through age and aeons – in the one direction: towards your love.

Forgive us, God, for making idols of the things that change, and ignoring what does not change. In your great love. Amen.

Collect of the Day

God of glory, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us in your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share in the life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Isaiah 61.10 - 62.3

¹⁰ I 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.

¹¹ For 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 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.

² The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.

³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Galatians 4.4-7

⁴When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Singing the Faith 222 Who would think that what was needed (tune 'Scarlet Ribbons')

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 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. | 2 | Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,
monarchs scorn and angels sing;
such a place 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. |
| 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. | | |

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958) Words: From Heaven Shall Not Wait © 1987, WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland.
<www.wgrg.co.uk>

Luke 2.22-40

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to

be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Reflection

You are no longer a slave but a child, an heir of the kingdom through the actions of God. In the birth of Christ we are saved and made heirs of the kingdom through Jesus and that goes for all of us who accept him as Lord and Saviour.

The Sunday after Christmas can be a low point in the year after the build up to Christmas Day. Gone is the expectation and the hope of things to come but the gospel story drags us back to the reality of what has happened. In Simeon we have a man who has waited long years for the Messiah to be born and at long last his wait is over. Yet as he breathes that sigh of relief so he too sees what the future will bring. He sees salvation through Jesus and that this salvation is for the Gentiles as well, but he also sees the pain and anguish that will come for those who love Jesus – a sword will pierce Mary’s soul.

A question that was asked a number of years ago by a well-known Baptist minister focussed on whether God sending his son to die was a form of cosmic child abuse. I was thankful to hear his concerns because it is something that we might all wrestle with. How can an all loving God send His Son to die? If you read through the gospels it is easy to find the points where Jesus makes his own decision to die on the cross – so this is not ‘cosmic child abuse’ as Jesus could have backed out from this death. What it does show us is the love of the Son who sees the need before him and comes to the same conclusion that the Father had seen.

In the accounts of Jesus’ life, we must be struck by the way in which it is love that rules the day in every situation. The Father shows love in sending Jesus in the hope that the world will accept him, repent and come back to the straight path. The Son shows us that love can change the world for all people. It is love or compassion that brings Jesus to tears as he sees pain and hurt before him. His part is to show a better way based on love that is willing to sacrifice all things so that others may live.

Warfare doesn’t change the world in the long run because human power is limited. Riches and wealth do not change the world for eternity because these material things fade over time. All that can change the world is love. Christmas is about love, God’s love coming to earth so that the world might be changed and the hope is that someday all will see and understand that truth so that when Jesus comes again it will not be to this place of tears but to a place where true love has brought joy and God’s Messiah is welcomed back and the kingdom has come on earth.

Christina Rossetti sees the sign of God’s love that came at Christmas as being shown in the love that we show towards God and all the world. Feel free to sing that hymn now or if you don’t know it read the words and ponder on them.

Singing the Faith 210 Love came down at Christmas – Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Love came down at Christmas,	Worship we the Godhead,	Love shall be our token,
Love all lovely, Love divine;	Love incarnate, Love divine;	love be yours and love be mine,
Love was born at Christmas,	worship we our Jesus:	love to God and all the world,
star and angels gave the sign.	but wherewith for sacred sign?	love for plea and gift and sign.

Intercessions

Great Deliverer, I pray for freedom: from poverty; from oppression; from war. I remember before you . . .

Great Deliverer: free your people.

Great Deliverer, I pray for freedom: from illness; from loneliness; from despair. I remember before you . . .

Great Deliverer: free your people.

Great Deliverer, I pray for freedom: from sin; from guilt; from anxiety.

Silence

Great Deliverer: free your people.

Great Deliverer, I pray for freedom: from selfishness; from apathy; from fear.

Silence

Great Deliverer: free your people.

In the name of Christ, who took on the limitations of human life that all might know the glorious liberty of the children of God. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Offering and prayer of dedication

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

Singing the Faith 213 O little town of Bethlehem – Phillips Brooks (1835*1893)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight. | 2 | O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all the earth!
For Christ is born of Mary;
and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love. |
| 3 | How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming;
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still
the dear Christ enters in. | 4 | O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in;
be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Immanuel! |

Blessing

O come to us abide with us our Lord Immanuel! Come into hearts and minds this Christmas season so that all may know the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and may that blessing remain with each one of us always. **Amen.**

Copyright acknowledgement (where not already indicated above):

Some material included in this service is copyright: © 1989 National Council of Churches, USA

Intercessions (Year B - First Sunday of Christmas) © 1998 Christine Odell, Epworth Press

Some material included in this service is copyright: © 1999 Judy Jarvis and Donald Pickard, Epworth Press

Some material included in this service is copyright: © 1999 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes

Collect (Christmas 1) © Joint Liturgical Group