

Morning Praise @ Home 24 December 2023

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen *cf Psalm 51*

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Reading John 1:1 – 14

Reflection from John

Surprisingly, in John's Gospel there's no mention of Joseph and Mary, the manger or the shepherds, but a focus directly on Jesus and who he is.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." (John 1:1-5)

In this passage we learn several things about the Son.

1. He is called the Word -- the *Logos*, the very communication, expression of God the Father. God's message to the world in human form,
2. He is with God and *is* God,
3. He is the Creator of all things,
4. He is the source of Life, and
5. He is the brilliant Light that illuminates the dark corners of our souls and dispels our darkness.

Since Christ is so central to any meaning on Planet Earth, so much the essence of life itself, it is impossible for a human being to construct a healthy, vibrant personal identity without him at its centre. You can fake independence, but ultimately life without Christ as Lord is hollow, dim, unfulfilling, and off-balance.

The War between Light and Darkness (John 1:5)

There is so much to talk about in this very rich passage, but I want to focus on the pitched battle between Light and darkness.

"The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." (John 1:5, NIV)

"Darkness" in verse 5 seems to refer to all those who live in spiritual darkness. It captures the darkness of our world today in which conflict rages while peace feels so elusive, and Light is shining but people and places somehow haven't "understood" or grasped it.

John observes: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." (1 John 3:8)

Christ's light, God's glory, represents and brings true life itself. Light is brimming with inextinguishable life. And this light and life continue to combat darkness and death wherever they are found.

The Light Is Not Recognized or Received by All (John 1:9-13)

Sadly, not all are willing to receive this light.

"⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." (John 1:9-11)

Though Jesus is a Jew, the Jewish leaders as a whole reject him - Jesus' mission is exclusively directed towards the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24; 10:6), but they don't listen. They reject the Light.

The battle between light and darkness rages on. Paul speaks of it:

"The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Many resist this light and refuse to allow his searching brilliance to illuminate the dark corners of their hearts. Yet to those who receive him and keep focused on him, there is wonderful healing, cleansing and change.

"And we all, with unveiled face,
beholding the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image
from one degree of glory to another." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The Word Became Flesh (John 1:14a)

Now we come to the astounding text, the ultimate Christmas text:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Christmas is all about the Word becoming flesh, taking on a human body, a physical body. The theological word for this is "incarnation." Paul describes it poetically in his letter to the Philippians.

"Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death --
even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6)

May the light and life of Christ shine on you this Christmas.

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession led by Ron

O God of all justice and peace we cry out to you in the midst of the pain and trauma of violence and fear which prevails in the Holy Land. Be with those who need you in these days of suffering; we pray for people of all faiths – Jews, Muslims and Christians and for all people of the land.

While we pray to you, O Lord, for an end to violence and the establishment of peace, we also call for you to bring justice and equity to ALL peoples. Guide us into your kingdom where all are treated with dignity and honour as your children. May you bless us with tears to shed for all those suffering with pain, hunger, homelessness and rejection so that we may reach out our hands to comfort and help them.

We pray for those in most need within our own families and neighbourhood, the sick, the lonely and the housebound. We pray for all those who care for them and we ask that you bestow on them your gifts of patience, compassion and understanding.

We also pray for those known to us who are troubled or lonely or in some other special need at this time as we share a brief moment of silence.

As we have named them in our hearts so let them feel your presence and friendship in their lives.

Mary prayed that the mighty be cast down from their thrones, we pray that those in power would use that power wisely and compassionately so that the lowly would be lifted up, the hungry fed and greater equality be established between rich and poor. Lord God, we join our prayers to those of Mary, your faithful servant and mother of our Lord, to proclaim your greatness, and sing in gratitude for all your wonderful gifts bestowed on us.

Lord, look down with love upon our Church here in Burton as day by day we struggle to be a body worthy of Jesus' name.

Be with us Heavenly Father, as the dawn of Christmas Eve has now broken, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude and anticipation. We thank you for the precious gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate today.

On this special morning we ask for your presence to be with us throughout the day. Help us to keep our hearts centred on the true meaning of Christmas. Let the joy and hope of this season fill our souls as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Saviour.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**