



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION**  
**SUNDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2021 – 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY BEFORE LENT**

**COLLECT**

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and made us in your own image:  
teach us to discern your hand in all your works  
and your likeness in all your children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,  
now and for ever.

**Psalm 104.25-end**

25 People go forth to their work ♦  
and to their labour until the evening.

26 O Lord, how manifold are your works! ♦  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

27 There is the sea, spread far and wide, ♦  
and there move creatures beyond number, both small and great.

28 There go the ships, and there is that Leviathan ♦  
which you have made to play in the deep.

29 All of these look to you ♦  
to give them their food in due season.

30 When you give it them, they gather it; ♦  
you open your hand and they are filled with good.

31 When you hide your face they are troubled; ♦  
when you take away their breath,  
they die and return again to the dust.

32 When you send forth your spirit, they are created, ♦  
and you renew the face of the earth.

33 May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; ♦  
may the Lord rejoice in his works;

34 He looks on the earth and it trembles; ♦  
he touches the mountains and they smoke.

35 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; ♦  
I will make music to my God while I have my being.

36 So shall my song please him ♦  
while I rejoice in the Lord.

37 Let sinners be consumed out of the earth  
and the wicked be no more. ♦  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.  
Alleluia.

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### **Coloss 1.15-20**

5 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

### **John 1.1-14**

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 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.

## **Reflection – this week from Hannah**

One of the real perks of ministering in a multi-parish benefice like ours at Christmas time is that those of us leading worship often get to hear those glorious, beloved words of John 1 five, six... sometimes seven times. I will never forget one year, when I began to speak about this passage by saying something like 'These words are some of the most majestic and poetic in the whole of scripture', at which point, someone in the congregation called out 'only in the Authorised Version'!

This famous gateway to John's Gospel, immediately propels us into the soaring metanarrative- those opening words signposting us to the very beginning of the bible, pressing us to recognise the significance and the mystery of this word who is the true light of the world, who was made flesh and has come to dwell among us. And we too are given a place in the story- we are children of God- and Jesus lives with us in all the mess and fleshiness of humanity- God in Christ has become our brother, neighbour, our companion.

*'and the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth'.*

Christ is here. In the chaos of divergent experiences, uncertainty, harrowing news and our eerily quiet, seemingly small lives, Jesus is present. It's a simple message, but one to keep close to- especially in the yearning we feel just now. It is a reminder, once again, that our struggles are not new to Christ, for he is with us in them- he's amongst us, accompanies us, and will never leave us.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the Baptism of Christ. There is a tradition in the iconography of the Orthodox Church that depicts Jesus in a filthy River Jordan, full of mythical sea monsters- disruptive, messy, dangerous. We often think of baptism as a washing clean- a kind of protective gloss varnish that keeps the darkness out- but in this image we are challenged by a God who is at home in the murky depths- is truly in flesh with us, and feeling it all. He meets us full of grace and truth. His presence is pure gift and it hides nothing.

As we appreciate signs of Spring around us, we perhaps are also beginning to appreciate a glimpse of the future opening up again. But change is difficult and messy, even change for the better. The vaccine rollout is undoubtedly a massive blessing, drenched with hope- but it is complex for us as social beings to be in these in-between times, when some of us feel safer than others, and when the work to protect us all from the virus is a long way from done. It's hard too as global citizens, as we've seen this past week when the brutal reality of the vaccine buy-up and distribution on the international stage has caused real tension. There are reports of increases in mental health issues amongst young people. This is a fragile time for neighbourliness on every level, yet here, in our Gospel we are reminded that in God grace and truth are unwavering, no matter how dark the world becomes.

And so as we worship, as we follow Christ and pray that God will, by God's Spirit, keep that ongoing work of transformation alive in us, perhaps it is timely to pray for those Christ-like gifts of grace and truth, as we greet the world around us, in new ways and with ever deepening levels of patience. And in these bumpy days, part of that is reconstruing the ways in which the fruits of the Spirit speak in our daily lives. It tickles me to notice the new rituals we've developed to communicate our care for each other- how we've learned to smile and very obviously step out

into the road at about a ten metre distance from the person we've spotted on the path ahead. Just now, that's a real act of grace, of gift- a moment to be grateful for- we've noticed another, we've cared for them, we give them space so that they are safe. What at first glance may seem too trivial to mention, can actually teach us something about our common humanity.

So as we travel onwards, exhausted in many ways, wishing this was over, longing for public worship to return... may our hearts be gladdened by the grace and truth that the living Christ brings, who is wholly prepared to enter the depths with us, and to endure. Amen.