

OLD TESTAMENT

NEW TESTAMENT

31 January 2021

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Let's begin with a time of SILENCE followed by PRAYER

LISTEN Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full into His face

Let's PRAY....

As people, as a Church, a community of faith, we gather in this time and space, to listen, to speak, to worship, to pray in the presence of our God and His Son, Jesus our Christ.

Loving God! In Your presence, Your peace calms and stills our spirit quelling confusion and despair, Your Word heals sickness, liberates those imprisoned by fear and intimidation, brings justice in the midst of oppression and strength in the midst of weakness. Your touch Loving Father, heals the broken places of our lives. Let the Holy Spirit fill us with Your power today, that we may be renewed in our faith in You and please our complete trust in You.

May our worship this morning, glorify You and Your Name above all Names, we ask through Jesus our Christ. **AMEN.**

SING This is my Father's World

Our Father's world is groaning with sickness and corruption. Negative emotions sap everyone's strength, especially those who struggle to fit their faith into the world's ways, and fake news diverts our attention from Truth.

Let's COMMIT OUR WORLD to the AUTHOR of CREATION and LIFE

Creator God! You commanded this world into existence and saw it was perfect. Thank you for this beautiful and extraordinary world; even with rampant sin of greed, selfishness and self-centredness, nature around us is a reminder of resilience, grace, hope and life.

We wake up to bird-song which we do not understand, yet enjoy. We draw back our curtains to see the changing weather whose beauty and fury are under Your control.

Father! We have diminished Your power to the cycle of nature, and Your character to best of humankind. Miracles no longer astound us with awe, because the magician's sleight of hand enthral us. The impossible becomes real when science reveals its secrets to the most inquisitive researchers.

Loving Father! Only You can break through our pride and arrogance of achievement, and break apart the impenetrable evils of oppression, and only You can cast out the very real fears that paralyse us.

Holy God! Forgive us when our silence and inaction contributes to the brokenness in our own lives and the lives of people around us.

Merciful Master! Forgive us when we do not trust you to deal with the unspeakable awfulness in our lives and in our world.

In these moments of silence we name the things we have done that separate us from you.

Father! Transform our hearts that our minds may be occupied in relishing You at work among us. Make us a new creation in Christ, that we might be Your light in this world. In the Name of Jesus Your Son and our Saviour. **AMEN.**

SING **He knows your Name**

READING **John 1:6-18**

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognise him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed

him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human[b] and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.[c] And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.

John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, “This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’”

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.

SING Down on my knees, I found my Lord

MESSAGE

The four Gospels are a rich trove of information on the life and teaching of Jesus the Christ. Four voices, each giving different perspectives on the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Early Christian writers¹ understood these are not four separate gospels, rather one four-fold gospel.

Mark, the youngest Disciple and likely the first to write a basic biographical narrative of the significant events of Jesus’ life, started with Jesus’ baptism.

Matthew and Luke drew on Mark’s biographical material, Matthew writing to the Jewish community connecting Jesus with Jewish prophecies and socio-religious custom, while Luke appears to have been commissioned by the “most honourable Theophilus” to research the life of Jesus. He went further to document the events Jesus predicted would happen in a sequel titled, *The Acts*

¹ Origen (A.D. 185-254)

of the Apostles. A better title might be, *The Acts of the Apostles through the Power of the Holy Spirit*, who is mentioned 42 times in 28 chapters.

John's Gospel was written towards the end of the first century. About fifteen years prior, Jerusalem had fallen into Roman hands, the Temple was destroyed and its immense wealth looted. The Jewish diaspora grew by the end of the first century, as they left Jerusalem and scattered all over the world.

John's aim was to present the reader with the evidence to *believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*² *To all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God.*³

Having started in the Gospel of John, it is appropriate for us to continue exploring the evidence which will build, sustain and enrich our faith in God.

*So, the Word became human, "pitched His tent" and made His home among us.*⁴

John says, *He (Jesus) returned to the home He created, but the people in His home did not recognise him; they rejected Him!*⁵

I am not captivated by war and post-war stories in books and film, especially those of a father returning home after being away for a l-o-n-g time, largely because of the emotional trauma for all concerned. Things are invariably not the same when he left, life has not stood still for any one, and the anguish and agony of discovering, the woman he loved has found someone else to love, and his children do not recognise Him, nor want anything to do with him.

When *The Word* came to this world, He did not come as an alien. He returned to the home He created, *in the beginning*. But God knew, His Son's return would create a major shock-upset, so He hid him as the carpenter's son, until His work of salvation was complete, that of defeating death through His resurrection.

² John 20:31

³ John 1:12

⁴ John 1:14

⁵ John 1:10-11

At the start, John cuts to the chase and explains, *Until you believe God's purpose for sending His Son back home to the world He created with the Father, AND until you accept Jesus God's Son defeated death, which the empty tomb testifies, you cannot be called a child of God.*⁶ The rest of his Gospel is the evidence needed to *believe*.

Like the mother who spoke endearingly about "father" gone to war that they would enjoy a better life when he returned, over thousands of years, prophets like Isaiah spoke of the Messiah, engaging people to anticipate *the One who is coming, who will preach good tidings to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, open the prison doors to those who are bound by it, comfort all who mourn, console those who mourn in Zion, give them beauty for ashes and oil of joy for mourning, exchanging their spirit of heaviness with garments of praise.*⁷

As years slipped into decades, decades into centuries, God's promise of a Messiah faded from conscious memory. The trials of life, famines and conquests dimmed the hope of a Messiah in the conscious memory of people, constantly pushing further any hope into the hazy and blurry distant horizon.

When Jesus returned home and the time came for Him to begin His work of teaching, preaching and healing⁸ (all Isaiah detailed in 61:1-3), God considered it appropriate to have John (Jesus' second cousin), introduce Jesus to the world.

Matthew⁹ Mark¹⁰ and Luke¹¹ cite John the Baptist reminding people of Isaiah's prophecy, *Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness [remove the obstacles]; Make straight and smooth in the desert a highway for our God*¹² further declaring, *I am NOT The Light, I am simply a witness telling you about The Light, the One who is the True Light, who gives Light to everyone, was coming into the world.*¹³

⁶ John 1:12

⁷ Isaiah 61:1-3

⁸ Matthew 4:23

⁹ Matthew 3:3

¹⁰ Mark 1:3

¹¹ Luke 1:76 and 3:4

¹² Isaiah 40:3

¹³ John 1:8-9

John the Baptist makes a clear distinction between him and Jesus. Speaking of Himself he says, *I am merely pointing out to you the One whose ministry is after mine, who existed long before me*¹⁴... *His ministry follows mine, and I am not even worthy to be His slave and untie the straps of his sandals.*¹⁵

Of Jesus, John the Baptist says, *God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the Unique One, who is Himself God, is near to the Father's heart. HE HAS REVEALED GOD TO US!*¹⁶

John the Baptist reveals Jesus to us by pointing Him out and making Him known, but **Jesus reveals God to us!**

Let's ponder this thought through the coming week.

Getting to know the person of Jesus is the **ONLY** way of knowing God and appreciating His plans, purposes and timing. The better we know Jesus, the greater our confidence in pointing others to Him and inviting them to get to know Him. Jesus then reveals the Father to them as he has to us!

This would be a worthwhile goal for us in 2021 - getting to know Jesus better!

AMEN

SING **My life is in Your Hands!**

BENEDICTION

Father! Release us into Your world to be the One who points to the Christ, only because we have discovered Him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Open our eyes to see those who need to discover You and know You more.

Open our hearts to find joy in Your presence, with Jesus our Christ.

Open our lips to speak of Him who showed us Your love.

In the Name of the One who is coming soon to restore us to You. **AMEN.**

LISTEN to Encouraging Singing

while you make coffee

¹⁴ John 1:15

¹⁵ John 1:27

¹⁶ John 1:18