

### Opening Sentences

*'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord, 'They are plans for good and not disaster, to give you a future and a hope.'* Jeremiah 29.11

**Carol** *'Once in Royal David's city'*

### Opening Prayer

From the beginning of time to the fullness of the new earth and heaven, Holy Spirit, You breathe and blow, dancing to our Creator's tune, in step with our Saviour's purposes. Fill our expectant hearts as we stand on this threshold of a new year. We have had New Years so many times; and we have never been here before.

Source of life, Saviour, Light of the World, refreshing and replenishing God, all that pours from you is good and wise and true. Fill us with the delight of your surprising nearness and in your presence may we find joy.

God in Community, how privileged we are to be your people, chosen and known and loved by you, here and now this morning and in all our days gone by and still to come. Amen

**Carol** *Of the Father's love begotten*

**Bible Reading** Jeremiah 31.7-14

*... 'The Lord, who scattered his people, will gather them together and watch over them as a shepherd does his flock. For the Lord has redeemed Israel from those too strong for them. They will come home and sing songs of joy on the heights of Jerusalem. They will be radiant because of the many gifts the Lord has given them – the good crops of wheat, wine, and oil, and the healthy flocks and herds. Their life will be like a watered garden, and all their sorrows will be gone. The young women will dance for joy, and the men – old and young - will join in the celebration. I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them and exchange their sorrow for rejoicing. I will supply the priests with an abundance of offerings. I will satisfy my people with my bounty. I, the Lord, have spoken!'*

### Reflection

These are powerful words of restoration to the exiled remnant of Israel. Their glory days are gone, and those who were captured had been advised to settle, make the most of life in Babylon, pray for their foreign captors, and wait. But now the prophetic word becomes different: more positive and hopeful. Like the philosopher Ecclesiastes saying, 'there is a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together,' so the time is coming when the people themselves, scattered far and wide, will be gathered by God for an emotional return home.

This will be no triumphant army on the march, but a gathering of different people of all ages and abilities, in dribs and drabs, probably both singing and crying. Prophecy is always poetry and needs to be read aloud in all its passion and pathos.

This is the voice of promise and a daring hope, not unlike the poetry of Revelation 21 saying 'mourning and crying and pain will be no more'. Jeremiah spoke this when the people were under occupations by the Babylonians; although he was not deported, he was imprisoned where he lived. So, he spoke not as one outside the desolation but caught up in it and he bore the lonely burden of having warned of what was coming and not been listened to.

How do these words feel for us as we imagine our own futures in a world beyond the pandemic? People have coped, languished and mourned in this exile of our day, and like Israel in Babylon, we still wait. We have heard a succession of warnings and dire predictions which have not been universally heeded. When the time comes for togetherness and celebration, it may be through tears. The plenty and watered garden of Jeremiah's poem may not have matched the reality of the actual return. But dreaming and imagining give form to hope and encourage us to be confident of God; to take heart simply because God is with us and will be with us into the 'new normal.'

**Carol** *Before the world began*

**Bible Reading**      John 1.10-18

*...So, the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. John the Baptist pointed him out to the people. He shouted to the crowds, 'This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before I did.' We have all benefitted from the rich blessings he brought to us – one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But his only Son, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart; he has told us about him.*

### **Reflection**

John, Jesus' beloved disciple, declares the existence of Jesus since the beginning of time however, he knows not everyone has received this revelation. He is not showing a superior attitude toward others but encouraging all to see, receive, and come to know that they may belong to God, who is described as a loving parent. John was blessed to have been with Jesus and to be an eyewitness to the grace and truth of Jesus' life and ministry. It is because of this that he testifies that he has seen the glory of God in this man Jesus. This is his starting point before he shares with us stories of Jesus' life which reveal that this man has indeed made God known.

The words of both Jeremiah and John were spoken and written to inspire faith; to deepen people's knowledge of God and therefore their confidence in God. What would we say of our trust in God at this new year? What has shaken or threatened

that trust recently? What has helped us to 'take heart'? How do these ancient words of scripture – addressed to people who are struggling or secure, or young or old – speak to us and encourage us?

Some of us, may not feel uplifted or encouraged, and may not find our confidence return or grow. That's OK. These are not the voices of fair-weather friends, but of people who struggled and were persecuted and knew keenly their own doubts. What are our own stories of being able to trust God precisely because life has not been easy or smooth? What can we confidently say, without cockiness or hesitancy, about who God is and what God has done for us? How can we be encouraged to go forward into the New Year with the assurance that God goes ahead of us and will be with us each step of the way and will one day bring wholeness and peace to all the world.

## **Carol**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord our God, faithful and kind, you have always been our help. With and without our asking, with and without our recognition, you are the wind in our sails, the light to our path. It is your pleasure to help, and for this we thank you. You never neglect us. Even when we are too despairing to ask or too weary to find words; it is your pleasure to help, and for this we thank You. So, we seek Your help again. Bring deep rest to those exhausted and spent. Bring deep solace and comfort to those bearing loss. Bring deep purpose to those plodding on or not sure of the way forward. Bring deep release to those glad to see the back of 2020. Bring wisdom to those leading and governing. Bring to us all trust in what is possible in partnership with you. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus, AMEN.

**Carol** *Hail to the Lord's anointed*

## **HOLY COMMUNION**

### **Offering**

We bring these offerings along with this bread and this wine to the table of the LORD. With them we bring ourselves, all that we are and all that we own.

May the ordinary become holy, and heaven be opened to the people of earth.

### **The Invitation**

Jesus was often a guest.

He shared many meals with his friends,

and they long remembered his words at the table.

Though some disapproved of the company he kept,

Jesus ate and drank with all kinds of people

and showed everyone the love of God.  
Wherever people met together  
Jesus was glad to be welcomed and to be fed.  
Today, we are the guests of Jesus.  
He welcomes us, whoever we are and whatever we bring,  
and he will feed us at his table.  
Old or young, rich, or poor, joyful or in sorrow,  
Jesus invites us all to share this special ancient meal with him,  
to remember the story of his life, death, and resurrection,  
to celebrate his presence with us today  
and to pray that God's Kingdom will come,  
just as thousands down the generations  
and across different cultures have done.  
*Our appropriate response is one of thanksgiving:*

**The Thanksgiving:**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.  
You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.  
You gave us the words of your prophets,  
the stories of your people through the generations,  
and the gathered wisdom of many years.  
You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up  
in difficult times when there was little peace.  
He showed people your love and told stories to change us all.  
He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.  
He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.  
In the end he offered his life for the world, facing suffering and death.  
Yet you raised him from death and now he lives with you forever.  
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,  
to remind us of Jesus Christ, and to make us one in him.

Therefore, with all your people in heaven and on earth  
we sing the triumphant hymn of your glory:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise you that we are here today, around the table of Jesus.  
We have heard the good news of your love.  
The cross is the sign of your arms stretched out in love for us  
and the empty tomb declares your love is stronger than death.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:  
**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Send your Holy Spirit upon us your people, that Christ may be with us in this  
meal, and we may be made ready to live for you and to do what you ask of us,  
today, and every day to come.

We join these prayers with the prayer Jesus taught his followers:

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**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 this day 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.**

#### **THE PEACE**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
**Peace be with you.**

#### **The Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Wine & the Narrative of the Institution**

On the night before he died, Jesus shared a meal with twelve of his disciples

in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. The Gospel writer tells us what happened that night.

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, (*lift and break bread*) and after blessing it he broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body'.

Then he took a cup, (*raise cup*) and after giving thanks he gave it to them and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I tell you, I will never again drink the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' Mark 14.22

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us.

Therefore, let us keep the feast.

*This bread symbolises Christ's body offered for the world. Let us eat with thanksgiving.*

*This fruit of the vine symbolises Christ's blood shed for the world; he gave his life so that we might have new life in him. Let us drink with thanksgiving.*

### **Prayer after Communion**

Let us pray.

**Most gracious God, we praise you for what you have given  
and for what you have promised us here.**

**You have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth.**

**You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.**

**Now we give ourselves to you; and we ask that our daily living  
may be part of the life of your kingdom,**

**and that our love may be your love reaching out into the life of the world,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Amen**

*Carol See amid the winter's snow*

### **Blessing and Dismissal**