

Morning Praise @ Home 17th 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

Luke 1: 67 – 79

Reflection from Philip

Christmas is a time for giving and receiving gifts.

Ha! more socks – but that's OK; we all need socks, and anyhow, it's the giving that counts, right? It's all part of feeling the spirit of Christmas.

But just now, with ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and The Middle East, and elsewhere, it can feel awkward and difficult to get into the Christmas spirit. I don't want to declare humbug, I don't want to be the Grinch, but while we will still do the gifts, share Christmas greetings, and have the Christmas meal, I am sure that for some of us, it might feel uncomfortable celebrating when there is so much conflict and suffering in the news.

I want us to think about three special gifts this Christmas, which can go some way to helping us think about the true meaning of Christmas, gifts that remain as relevant today in our messed-up world of conflicts as they were when a baby was born in a stable in a country under an occupying Roman army 2,000 years or so ago. God's only son, in human flesh.

That baby named Jesus grew into a man, and in his life, death and resurrection, we received three special gifts from God.

The Gift of Love:

Christmas is a time to celebrate the love that God has for us. Perhaps the best-known verse in the bible is John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave us his only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Love is the greatest gift of all; God's love for us is the reason for the Christmas season. He gave us his son.

God so **loved** the world – the Greeks had 4 words for love, this one was Agape – which means **unconditional love**. It means he doesn't care what you have done. He has paid the price for everything we ever have done and will do wrong.

Who did God love? **The world** - All of us.

God gave his one and only son – that's who the baby was in the manger. Some people want to keep baby Jesus in that manger. As a baby, a sweet Christmas nativity scene.

But we celebrate Christmas for what that baby did for us **as a man**. He came to teach us the truth. He came to reveal God to us. He came to die for us.

Christmas is about the birth of God's Son – Jesus. It is about how he came to give us love; that message doesn't change from year to year. When there is so much bad news and devastation in the world, this is good news worth celebrating!

If you feel able to pray, then pray for God's **love** to be felt in all areas of conflict tonight, and also among us, in our community and among our families.

The Gift of Peace:

We can see it's a broken world. We've made a mess of it – with wars, with the exploitation of resources, pollution and now we are seeing the effects of climate change.

Jesus came to earth to bring peace between God and - well, us lot, who keep messing up. He never forces it on us. It's completely up to us whether to accept Him in our lives. The world remains imperfect, but if we accept him, we can be peacemakers in our own lives and in the world around us.

It's quite understandable to question how God can allow such suffering, especially with so many innocent people and children involved. We might shout out to God, '**how can you let this happen?**' We **can** be angry with God. That's OK. The Bible is full of people angry with God.

If you are angry, just be honest with yourself and God about it. Acknowledge that even though we don't understand how these things can be allowed to happen, we trust He can deal with them. Ask him to intervene.

If you feel you can pray, then please pray tonight for justice and an end to the suffering in Ukraine and the Middle East. Pray for peace.

The Gift of Hope:

Jesus came to earth to bring hope to a broken world. We can find hope in him, even during difficult circumstances. God is always with us, despite this being an imperfect, broken world. God is still here, even under the rubble in Ukraine and the ruins in the Middle East. He is with the frightened and the refugees. This is our consolation. In Psalm 23, David describes how He walks alongside us when we are suffering, in the valley of the shadow of death, when we need him most. A valley we can walk through, to the hope beyond.

If you feel able to pray, then I ask you to pray tonight that those who are suffering will feel His healing and comforting presence. Particularly those in areas of conflict. Give them hope, and Lord, give **us** hope too.

That baby born in the stable is our hope. That's why we celebrate—to remind ourselves of the truth of the gospel. That God loves us. God has promised that all our hurt will someday be put right. We can have the hope of life in God's presence starting right now, and always.

So this Christmas time, please do enjoy giving and receiving gifts, and celebrating with those special to you, but also celebrate God's special gifts of **Love, Peace and Hope**, given to all of us, if we accept him in our lives, through that baby born in the stable. **Amen**

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

Mighty God, give us faith like John the Baptist, strong enough to believe even in a desert that you and your kingdom are no farther from us than our hands. Make our heart strong like his, not swayed by trials or snared by false pleasures. Give us courage to be faithful until your promises are fulfilled.

We pray that as we pursue the many imaginative ways in which our Churches approach Christmas during Advent, help us to understand through them the different truths about God's amazing love and grace.

We pray for those whose responsibility it is to manage the world's economy, and for those who have difficult ethical decisions to make; we pray for wisdom and courage to do what is right. We pray for all who are terrorised throughout the world especially where fragile economies and international friendship and understanding are threatened as tourists no longer visit places affected by recent terrorist attacks.

Lord, we pray for those we see and talk to every day or every week; for those we often argue with or misunderstand; for those who brighten our lives and make us smile; for a greater thankfulness and appreciation of those we usually take for granted.

Loving God, all the needs of your children are already known to you and so with God-given love we bring to mind those who are suffering physically, spiritually or emotionally, that they may find you there beside them in these dark and painful times.

Merciful God, who sent John the Baptist to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation; Give us grace to take heed of his warnings and to turn away from our sinfulness so that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

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**