

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families

Sunday 13th December 2020 at 10:30 am
3rd Sunday in Advent

Welcome

This week is our Nativity Service, which recreates the scene of Jesus' birth and tells how Mary and Joseph were visited by the angels, the shepherds and then much later by the Magi. The service celebrates the birth of Jesus and takes us on the next stage of our Advent journey as we prepare for Christmas.

Call to worship

Come, let us rejoice before God. Let us honour the name of the Most High.
God has looked on us, and brought us to be a people of light celebrating the light.
Our souls magnify God: blessed is the name of God for ever. So, come let us praise God our Creator

Lighting the Candle

Living God, as we light these three candles in the name of Jesus, the light of the world: make straight our paths, enlighten our hearts and our minds, bless us on our Advent journey; and may your kingdom come.

Hymn R&S 141

Make way, make way For Christ the King in splendour arrives
Fling wide the gates and welcome Him into your lives

*Make way! (Make way!)
Make way! (Make way!)
For the King of kings
(For the King of kings)
Make way! (Make way!)
Make way! (Make way!)
And let His kingdom in*

Prayer of Approach, Thanksgivings and Confession

God of light shining so brightly, we meet today to preparing to greet you. We praise you, as you are a God of wonder, as the days shorten, the evenings get longer and the nights grow colder. Your creation moves through the seasons and we give you thanks.

May we hear you speaking to us, awaken in us a new hope as we look forward to new beginnings. Holy Spirit help us to clear the way and create space for the coming King.

Forgive us, Lord, when we do not look for your coming and do not notice the ways in which you reach out to us. Forgive us, and give us eyes to see that you come to us through the desert, and through the fields; through the crowds, and through the empty places; and through refugee camps; through the busyness of our lives, and the emptiness of our hearts; when we are weak, and when we are strong, you come to us at Advent and at Christmas. Forgive us, Lord

So unite us in fellowship and inspire us in worship, guiding our lives and preparing the way, so that we can follow you every moment of our lives. God of hope, love and peace help us to be patient and to remain alert as we wait for your return. God of grace come and meet with us now... Amen

Readings



Isaiah 61:1 -4 (8-11) – the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me

Psalms 126 - the Lord has done great things for us and we have rejoiced

John 1:6-8 (19-28) – there was a man called John and he came as a witness to testify to the light

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 – Pray without ceasing

Reflection

In our Nativity Play this Sunday we will see all the animals gathering around to worship a new-born baby. Should we be surprised at such a strange scene? Not when the Scriptures are full of references to the physical world of creation responding to God's presence and action.

The seas flee and the mountains skip and leap like lambs (Psalm 114), hills are clothed in gladness (Psalm 65) and break forth into joy (Isaiah 55), the trees of the fields clap their hands (Isaiah 55 again), as do the rivers (Psalm 98). Jesus asserts that if his disciples didn't praise him then the very stones would cry out (Luke 19). The ends of the earth sing for joy before the coming Lord (Psalm 96); the morning stars sing together (Job 38). Wild beasts lie with lambs in God's Kingdom (Isaiah 11) and even our bodies are the Temple in which God's Holy Spirit dwells (2 Corinthians 6). The Psalms climax with an exhortation to the whole of creation to praise the Lord including the sun and moon, great sea creatures and ocean depths, lightning, hail, snow, clouds, stormy winds, fruit trees and cedars, wild animals and cattle, small creatures and flying birds!! (Psalm 148) Everything that has breath praises the Lord (Psalm 150).

The culmination of this theme is Paul's great letter to the Church in Rome where he speaks of the great hope of creation "waiting in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed, in hope...that creation will be liberated from decay and brought into a glorious freedom of His children." (Romans 8)

God's purposes are literally "down to Earth" in His birth among us to show us the hope and way of salvation. Christians pray the most "down to earth" prayer as Jesus taught: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". Our hope at the coming of The Lord is of a new Heaven and a new Earth. So we ask for daily bread to feed our bodies...So Paul at the end of his beautiful, pastoral letter to the Thessalonians, prays a blessing not just on their souls and spirits but on their bodies too at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

God deals with the practical things. Many of our lectionary readings today concern the Lord's justice. Mary sings of the poor being fed while Jesus' own ministry begins by quoting Isaiah's pronouncement of good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners and the restoration of ruined cities. So the Lord's justice and righteousness surely encompass, not only bread for ourselves but bread for all and other everyday needs like clean water, safe housing and the protection of our environment.

There is a direct link between righteousness and justice. The two are like twin siblings in the Scripture always being quoted together. If justice is invoked righteousness is not far away. And so creation groans in expectation, of what? Of people who live like children of God standing up and taking their rightful place in the created order. We can now do so because, in the advent of Christ, the Word of God become flesh, God has made a way for us, and with us, the whole of creation, to be reconciled to God.

So “morning stars together” proclaimed His holy birth because creation saw in the advent of this fragile life of flesh, laid in a manger, the hope of all humankind and our world. In keeping with his incarnation in human form, God requires and needs human help. He needs us to work out our salvation in practical down-to-earth ways. It was so at the beginning of the story when Adam and Eve were set to work tending the earth and the earth laboured in pain, stress and decay at their rebellion as it does to this day.

It was so at the beginning of Jesus’ story when, to allow His story to unfold, God needed people to get involved in practical, down-to-earth ways: the dogged obedience of Mary in the face of the impossible, the risk-taking faith of Joseph in the face of misunderstanding, the hesitant welcome of an innkeeper, the joyful acceptance of shepherds and the unflinching journeying of the wise men.

What does God need as His story unfolds in our time? Will we defy all the forces of the Caesar’s and Herod’s of this world to join Him in His purposes and so give hope to our creation in this, our generation?

Music for Reflection R&S 138

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free,
From our fears and sins release us let us find our rest in thee
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation. Joy of every longing heart,
Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring

Prayers of Intercessions

God we thank you for world and all the wonders you have created. As we come to this time of peace we pray for the world. We think of areas where there is war, conflict, places where violence has become a way of life. Give us greater concern for each other and for your world.

We pray for the church in the world – And thank you – thank you for the family of your people meeting throughout the world this day –all of us gathered only too aware of our faults and our limitations, but knowing too, that you, Lord Jesus, can take the tiniest spark and fan it into a raging fire. We ask for your protection and that your light will shine where it is most needed.

May we find the courage to point to the hope and comfort and peace you offer, especially in times of difficulty and sorrow. May we witness to your love and your goodness, your presence and your compassion to our neighbour.

Give us the courage and the desire to seek to serve you as best we can –and in that service may we reflect the life you lived. We offer our prayers for those who struggle with this season.

We think of the bereaved, of those who cannot afford to celebrate as they might wish to. We remember those who are ill, those in hospital, those who are receiving care but unable to see their loved one

Those who are isolated, lonely, those struggling with dementia, those who have fallen and all who need your healing presence.

Challenging God in the face of injustice, help us to make new beginnings, help us to confront the issues in our lives and those around us

Lord as Advent moves on and Christmas dawns, may we know your closeness, open our lives to you and share your love with others, these prayers we now lift in and through the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. **Our Father** ...

Hymn**R&S 135**

Joy to the world, the Lord has come; let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns; let all their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy

No more let thorns infest the ground or sins and sorrows grow
Wherever pain and death are found he makes his blessings flow

Blessings

Comfort, joy and peace be yours.
Know how blessed you are
And go to be that blessing to all around you.

May God Almighty hold you and all whom you love
In the palm of His hand
This day and always.
Amen