

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families**

**Sunday 27th December 2020 at 10:30 am
1st Sunday of Christmas**

Call to worship

Come and meet us, O God, as we gather, yet apart,
and open our eyes to see the eternal truths all around us,
calling us into love and more love
and things that are everlasting.

Carol

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
O come and behold Him, born the King of Angels.
O come, let us adore Him. O come, let us adore Him. O come, let us adore Him.
Christ the Lord!

Prayer of Approach, Thanksgivings and Confession

God of glory, your splendour shines from a manger in Bethlehem, where the Light of the world is humbly born into the darkness of human night.

Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world, so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice, and defenders of all for whom there is no room.

We come to you to worship together today, people who have been walking in a cloud of darkness, looking forward to a time when your light is shining brightly once again.

Open our hearts in joy and praise.

There are times when the flame of our faith is dim. The candle is about to go out, keep us strong in your grace and allow our light to shine brightly once more.

Open our eyes to the brightness of your love.

We can often become introspective. Concerned only with our own problems and issues, ignoring those who are struggling in the world around us.

Open our ears to hear the call of those you love.

Rekindle our faith and provide our soul with peace

Forgive us Lord when we stumble and fall. Help us to get back on our feet and follow the teachings of your son, and hear us now as we join together in worship together

Readings



Isaiah 61: 10 - 62:3 – “I delight greatly in the Lord...”

Psalms 148 – “Let them praise the name of the Lord for his name alone is exalted!”

Luke 2: 22-40 – Jesus presented at the temple: Simeon holds Jesus in his arms and he says: “...for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples...”

Reflection

The Dutch priest and professor, Henri Nouwen declares that: “A waiting person is a patient person.

The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us.” So, today we’re thinking about waiting. Waiting is anticipation. Waiting is expectation. Waiting is challenging.

In the times we are living, we spend a lot of time waiting. Waiting to hug our family and friends. Waiting to hear news about restrictions and the lifting of restrictions. Waiting for a COVID test result. Waiting to gather in church buildings. And in our waiting, in our anticipation and expectation, we are also living in the hope of better times.

In our Gospel reading from Luke today, we are presented with two individuals: Anna and Simeon, who have been waiting their entire lives. Waiting in the hope of better times. What matters most about Simeon, I think, is that he is described as “looking forward.” That is an interesting phrase in English. Because of the way our heads are built, we ALWAYS are looking forward. But it is even more important to note that we are built, as human beings, to look forward, to peer beyond the challenging present moment in an effort to see a future that transforms things that need transforming.

Tim O’Brien describes this human trait, in his book *The Things They Carried*, this way: “You are filled with a hard, aching love for what the world could be, and always should be, but now is not.” This is exactly what it means to “look forward.” This is what Simeon is doing. The word for “waiting” in Hebrew, *qavah*, means being stretched tight, stretched even to the breaking point. Imagine, a string on a guitar, tightened and tightened and tightened yet some more, until finally it is about to snap.

In our Gospel reading, Simeon is stretched tight. He’s been waiting. He feels the tension, so powerfully, because he has waited at the Temple, so often and so long. Yet this waiting does not make him complacent, it does not make him cease to hope. If anything, he waits with a settled insistence that stuns me. As such, because of Simeon’s insistent waiting, something is revealed to him. Something is revealed to us. Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us. So we too, the reading seems to imply, are to be insistent in our waiting. And in our waiting, God will meet us there. In our waiting, God is present. A God of faith, hope and love. A God revealed in Jesus.

When Simeon sees, Mary and Joseph enter the Temple with Jesus, Simeon approaches them. He holds Jesus in his arms. Holding Jesus in his arms, he says: “for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.”

So, what is this salvation that Simeon has waited for? What is this salvation that Jesus offers? Salvation is God’s desire for abundant life and wholeness for all. What would salvation look like across the world? For a world ravaged by global warming, stewardship and sustainability. For those who are excluded, hospitality and welcome. For those who experience war and violence, peace and justice.

What would Salvation look like in our own lives, in Sheffield? Remember Tim O’Brien’s words about “a hard, aching love for what the world could be, and always should be, but now is not.” Salvation is God working with us and through us to create a new world. A world characterised by abundant life and wholeness for all people and planet.

Howard Thurman, a 20th century African-American pastor and poet, wrote these words in a poem called “The Work of Christmas”:

“When the star in the sky is gone. When the Kings and Princes are home. When the shepherds are back with their flocks. The work of Christmas begins. To find the lost ... To heal the broken... To feed the hungry ... To release the prisoner... To teach the nations ... To bring Christ to all ... To make music in the heart.”

So, as we head into this New Year, I invite us to undertake the Work of Christmas, so that the world we wait for, the world God desires, and the world we work with God to create, will come about. Amen

Music for Reflection (from *Rumours of Angels* by Graham Kendrick)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9AYqyfVBUU>

So many centuries of watching and waiting but when the moment came, well, nobody saw
Traders and travellers hurried by and life went on just like before
In all the clamour just a new baby crying: one more poor family shut out in the cold
Nothing unusual, sad to say. Hasn't it always been this way?

*But nothing will ever be the same again! This night has changed everything
Nothing will ever be the same again since the night he came*

So rare we recognise our history in the making; meet angels unawares and pass on our way
Blind to the moment of destiny while precious years just slip away
And now a door is standing open before you, casting its light into the darkness around
Stop for a moment, step inside. Tonight could be your Bethlehem

*And nothing will ever be the same again! This night has changed everything
Nothing will ever be the same again since the night he came*

Prayers of Intercession

Let us join together in our prayers for others, let us pray:

Gracious God, we pray today for all those who are lonely, who have no one to share the joy of Christmas with: may they feel the care and love of Jesus in the friendship of others. For the hungry who are unable to feed themselves and their families. We give thanks for the help of many, for the foodbanks and charities. We pray that they receive the help and support available

For the homeless who may find a doorway to shelter in. We give thanks for the people providing support around the streets of our towns and cities. For the homeless shelters and the support of charities, we remember HARC, The Salvation Army, and St. Wilfred's. Lord, we pray for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one at this time, those who are distraught and empty, full of confusion. Help them to feel your arms around them offering support and love

For those who are coping with illness and disease. Restricted from the love and care of their families as they receive treatment. Allow them to grow stronger in the knowledge that you are with them. We hold all emergency workers in our thoughts and prayers. For those who are working long hours to provide support for the most vulnerable. Provide them the strength and resources to cope with the stresses of this time

We pray for the leaders throughout our world, provide them with guidance and patience. Allow them to make the best decisions for the many and not the few. Remind them that they are responsible for the care of their people

Today, we also hold in our hearts, those who are close to us but feel far away. Those who are hurting and lost to your light. Those who have lost their way and are struggling to find your path. We bring them to you now in this time of silence... Strengthen our faith and resilience that we may help others in need. Enhance our hope and allow us to shine your light for all to see

Fill us with joy that we may share the joy of Jesus' birth through our lives. Allow our souls to be at peace, as we hold the fragile earth in our hearts today. Until we meet again we lift these prayers in and through the prayer Jesus taught his disciples....

Our Father...

Carol

Hark the herald angel sing. "Glory to the new-born king.
Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled".
Joyful all ye nations rise. Join the triumph of the skies.
With the angelic host proclaim. "Christ is born in Bethlehem"
Hark! The herald angels sing. "Glory to the new-born king"

Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing. "Glory to the new-born king"

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth. [Refrain
Hark! The herald angels sing. "Glory to the new-born king"

Blessing

May we go, ready to see God at work in the world,
open to hope for God's ways in the world,
and holding God's love in our lives.

And may the blessing of God, loving Father, new born Son, and living Spirit,
go with us, and to all those we are given to love,
this day, into 2021, and always, Amen