



Introductory Prayers

You Lord are the Light of the World;
In the darkness your light shines;
May our lives be beacons of hope,
When the darkness closes in,
And people are afraid.

Hymn: StF 20 Be Still

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;
Come bow before Him now, in reverence and fear;
In Him no sin is found – we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned:
How awesome is the sight – our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;
He comes to cleanse and heal, and minister His grace:
No work too hard for Him – in faith receive from Him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

Prayers of Adoration and Praise

God of all created things,
God of all space and time,
God of the morning light,
We praise and adore you.

Lord of the morning,
God of Trinity, three in one,
Saviour Jesus, man and God, lover and friend,
Holy Spirit, comforter and advocate, ever present Father God,
We praise and adore you.

Thank you living Lord God,
For the sure foundation of our faith:
Built not on rules, but on Life:
Your life in your son Jesus Christ.
We praise and adore you.

We thank you that your offer of love is unconditional:
Not governed by our ability to earn your love,
But by the deep and broad grace
You have shown the world in Jesus.

**We thank you that your grace is not offered to just a few, but to all;
All are called to repent, all called to believe, all called to eternal life. Amen**

Reading: Psalm 74:1-11

Why have you abandoned us like this O God?

Will you be angry with your own people forever?

Remember your people, whom you chose for yourself long ago, whom you bought out of slavery to be your own tribe.

Remember Mount Zion, where you once lived.

Walk over these total ruins - our enemies have destroyed everything in the Temple.

Your enemies have shouted in triumph in your Temple; they have placed their flags as signs of victory.

They looked like woodsmen, cutting down trees with their axes.

They smashed all the wooden panels with their axes and sledge hammers.

They wrecked your Temple and set it on fire; they desecrated the place where you are worshipped.

They wanted to crush us completely; they burned down every holy place in the land.

All our sacred symbols are gone; there are no prophets left, and no one knows how long this will last.

How long, O God, will our enemies laugh at you?

Will they insult your name forever?

Why have you refused to help us?

Why do you keep your hands behind you?

Reading - Mark 14:32-40

They came to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to them "Sit here while I pray."

He took Peter, James and John with Him. Distress and anguish came over Him, and He said to them,

"The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch."

He went a little farther on and threw Himself on the ground, and prayed that, if possible, He might not have to go through that time of suffering. "Father, He prayed, my Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want."

Then He returned and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Weren't you able you able to stay awake for even one hour?"

Sermon

In our Christian journeys, we cannot avoid those times when our world goes 'pear shaped'. It may be because of health, money or family problems, grief and emotional pain or it may be that our spiritual life takes a tumble; sometimes these might happen all at once and we ask the question 'Why?'

The stories above are all about Jesus being tempted to take the wrong course of action and the Exile. The Israelites, in their long history, looked back to the 40 years in the desert as a time of spiritual growth, when they experienced the presence of their God, even though they suffered the privations of desert life.

Hundreds of years later the people of Judah suffered the humiliation of being taken as slaves into Babylon. Jerusalem was destroyed and their Temple, the physical sign of God's presence, was burned to the ground. The Old Testament reading is taken from that time. The Psalm was written at a time when the Temple was destroyed and the Israelites were taken into captivity into Babylon.

The experience of exile is often likened by preachers to those times of distress in a person's life when all hope is gone. However, for the Jews this was a time was a flowering of their spiritual life. They collected together the histories of Israel, the books of the law, the Psalms and the books of prophesy.

They learned that God was still with them, even in Babylon. But most of all they finally purged their faith of destructive Pagan influences.

The lesson seems to be that these dark times can be a time of spiritual growth – if we let them. Many of us don't understand that those desert experiences, when we lose hold of our faith, when we no longer sense God's presence and our prayers seem to hit a brick wall.

St. John of the Cross called these times 'The Dark Night of the Soul.' Those people whose spirituality we most admire, like the great mystics, seemed to be most susceptible to this type of experience. Mother Theresa of Calcutta for example, said that she lost all sense of God's presence even though He seemed to be so real to her when she was young.

Jesus too suffered the wilderness experience when He was driven – not by Satan but by the Holy Spirit – into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. You would imagine that once Jesus had overcome the Devil He would be left alone to get on with His ministry. Nothing could be further from the truth! He was tempted to follow a different path on a daily basis; when His disciples misunderstood Him; when he went into the garden of Gethsemane to pray and most of all on the Cross when Jesus uttered those terrible words "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me." When He felt abandoned by His Father, could this be described as His Dark Night of the Soul?

But we know that this was not the end for Jesus. He experienced the resurrection. It would appear that having once overcome Satan He experienced the most wonderful flowering of His faith in His Lord and master. And that gives us great courage. We know that the desert experiences and the experiences of exile go hand in hand with the flowering of our faith.

Meditation:

The shadows fall, the light disappears and I am left alone, exposed, fearful.

I cry out in the darkness 'Why me? 'Where are you?' 'I can't see which way to go.'

I feel naked, lost and so afraid as the clouds envelop me.

Blind terror turns to anger and then rage as I shake my fist in defiance at a God that I no longer see.

This is so unfair! I've tried to remain faithful. What did I do to deserve this valley of shadows?

I rage and cry in turns, battering my fists against invisible walls until I bleed and there are no more tears left, just swollen eyes and a burning hardness in my throat.

And there is no relief.

I sit now crumpled and dejected.

'Help me Lord! Help me!' I whisper into the darkness: 'I cannot face this without you.'

Calm washes over me. The darkness remains, but there is the slightest glimmer far off. I hear a gentle voice;

'I never promised that your life in me would be easy, but I am always here. I hold you in the palm of my hand. You are dear to me my child and I will never let you go.'

Nothing in my circumstances change; I am still battered and bruised. The darkness still envelops me - but there is a difference.

Now I carry a light within me and I can see the path to follow, illumined one step at a time.

As an act of faith I step out onto that path.

The fear and the anger drain away as I place my hand in His and follow the way.

Others are on the path and I can offer them my hand so that my light can show them the way.

Together we will travel the valley of darkness, fearing no evil until we reach the light and the clouds part to reveal the Lord who has travelled the way with us.

Hymn: StF 238 Lead us heavenly Father, lead us

Lead us heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us for we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing, if our God our Father be.

Saviour breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness thou doest know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Tempted, taunted, yet undaunted, through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God descending, fill our hearts, with heavenly joy.
Love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy.
Thus provided, pardoned, guided nothing can our peace destroy.

Prayers of Confession:

Lord of Light,

You fill us, your children with your light,

So often your light in us is dimmed by our selfishness and greed.

There are times when we ignore those in need, those who are poor or who do not have anywhere to stay.

We sometimes look at other people and feel we are better than them, so we turn away.

We criticise other people who are doing the best they can.

We can make others feel inferior.

We are unprepared to speak out against injustice.

We are unprepared to stand up for Christ or witness to His love.

And so, the light is dimmed. Forgive us Lord and enable your light to shine through us so that others will see you in us and turn to you and find the answer to all their deepest needs.

We thank you Father that you have promised that when we come to you in repentance you are always prepared to forgive – so forgive us Lord and help us to change. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

In the Darkness

Let your Light shine

Lord of peace; bring peace where there is violence. We bring to you Lord, the people of Yemen, of Afghanistan, of Sudan and we bring to you the people of Ukraine. And we remember soldiers on both sides of the conflict. We bring to you the people of Syria. May those people in charge at this time seek justice and peace.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of Justice; we bring to you those people who live in fear; for those places where governments and soldiers impose their will. At this time we pray particularly for the peoples of the Holy Land, both Palestinians and Israelis, especially we pray for the people of Gaza and the West Bank who live in fear. May all the communities of that land find ways to live together with justice and peace? We also pray for those kept as hostages. May they be returned to their families soon.

We pray for our brothers and sisters living with persecution

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the poor and the marginalised; where there is poverty and unfairness; where people are hungry, homeless or suffering for the want of simple medicine, move in the hearts of those who have plenty so that there is a fair sharing of the earth's resources. We pray for all refugees living in terrible

conditions in camps – suffering from hunger, disease and a lack of hope. May they receive mercy, compassion and practical help.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of creation; forgive us for misusing your created world and making deserts where there had been abundance, for polluting clean air and water. We pray for the governments of the world who have met so often to discuss climate change. Give courage to those who work to save the environment. We pray for those who are suffering because of climate change – the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa who are suffering the worst drought in living memory, those suffering because of violent floods or wild fires or freak weather events

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of healing and wholeness; we bring to you those who are known to us personally who need your healing power.....

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the Kingdom of God, who came into this world, not to condemn it but to save, work with your people, give us courage, wisdom and power as we bring the message of your love and forgiveness to a needy world. Send your Holy Spirit and may your Kingdom Come.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine. Amen

Hymn: StF 248 I heard the voice of Jesus say

I heard the voice of Jesus say: 'Come unto me and rest
Lay down, O weary one lay down your head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad,
I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say: 'Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one stoop down and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life giving stream.
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say; I am this dark world's Light.
Look unto me, your morn shall rise and all your days be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found in Him my star my sun.
And in that light of life I'll walk till travelling days are done.

Final prayer

Lord may your Kingdom come

And your will be done.

May your peace be known in this world?

And your will be done.

May your peace and joy come into our hearts – even at this time?

And your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven. Amen