

Sunday January 1st 2023

A service of worship for use at home

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Charity number 1134226

On the first day of a New Year we share in worship, perhaps with a sense of excitement at what the year might hold, but maybe also with a sense of dread as we wonder what struggles might lay ahead. Whatever the future holds, we can be assured of God's presence with us, as he has been with his people throughout the years.

A call to worship

Come; let us tell each other about all that God has done.
Our God is gracious; His deeds are worthy of praise.
God has done so much for us;
His love is steadfast for we are His people.
He has become our Saviour.
He is with us, and He has saved us

Hymn STF 330 - Joy to the World

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

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders, wonders, of His love

Prayers

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens!
Praise Him, all his angels!
Praise Him, sun and moon!
Praise Him, all you twinkling stars!
Praise Him, skies above!

Let every created thing give praise to the Lord,
For He gave the word, and they came into being.
Praise the Lord sea creatures,
Fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather,

Mountains and all hills, trees and all cedars,
Big animals, domestic animals, small scurrying animals and birds,
Leaders and all people,
Young and old, grownups and children,

Let them all praise the name of the Lord.
For His name is very great.
His glory towers over the earth
and heaven!
Praise the Lord!
Amen

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.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Bible reading: Matthew 2:13-23

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'^[a]

¹⁶ When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ 'A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.'^[b]

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.'

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Hymn STF 176 - Like a candle flame

This song is a reminder of the confirmation that many of us need to receive – of God's presence with us, and that he has come to save us through the gift of His son.

Like A Candle Flame
Flickering Small In Our Darkness
Uncreated Light
Shines Through Infant Eyes

God Is With Us, Alleluia
God Is With Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia!

God Is With Us, Alleluia
God Is With Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia!

Yet His Light Shall Shine
From Our Lives, Spirit Blazing
As We Touch The Flame
Of His Holy Fire

Stars And Angels Sing
Yet The Earth Sleeps In Shadows
Can This Tiny Spark
Set A World On Fire?

God Is With Us, Alleluia
God Is With Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia!
Alleluia!

Reflection

We have seen that Herod was a past master in the art of assassination. He made short work of the Sanhedrin and the Supreme Court of the Jews. He also slaughtered three court officers plus his wife and her mother, his eldest son plus two other sons. Not a nice man!

It wasn't likely that Herod would accept a new-born baby who was born to be king. He had sneakily made enquiries with the Magi. He was working out the age of the child so that he could take appropriate steps towards his murder. The next step in his plan was to arrange for all the children under the age of two to be murdered. Bethlehem wasn't a large town and this wouldn't have exceeded twenty – thirty babies. This doesn't make the crime less terrible, but we must get the picture right and not see it in terms of hundreds of children.

Bethlehem was a comparatively small place, and in a land where murder was so widespread the slaughter of twenty to thirty babies would cause little stir and would probably only affect the grieving parents. But the fact that something isn't mentioned, even in the places where you might expect it to be mentioned, is no proof at all that it did not happen.

This is an indication of the lengths that people will go to to get rid of Jesus.

When Herod eventually died, he divided his kingdom into three parts which was given to his sons. Even after Herod's death it was still unsafe to return to Judea. So Joseph was guided to Galilee where a much better king reigned.

Joseph settled in Nazareth which is where Jesus was brought up. Nazareth lay in a hollow in the hills in the south of Galilee. You only had to climb the hills for half the world to be at your door. You could see the waters of the Mediterranean, blue in the distance, with the ships going out to the ends of the earth. Looking at the plains that skirted the coast you could see the road from Damascus to Egypt, the bridge to Africa. And this was the road on which centuries before, Joseph had been sold into Egypt as a slave.

Nazareth indeed was no backwater. Jesus was brought up in a town where the ends of the earth passed the foot of the hilltop.

Matthew clinches each event in the early life of Jesus with a passage from the Old Testament, which he saw as a prophecy.

So now the stage is set, Matthew has brought Jesus to Nazareth and in a very real sense Nazareth was the gateway to the world.

This Christmas we have received the gift of Jesus. In the same way that many folk after Christmas return their unwanted presents, let us not be people who give Jesus back, forgetting about who he is or, even worse, choosing to hide him away, as Herod wanted to do, because we think that we can cope without him. May 2023 be a year where Jesus is at the centre of our lives and not pushed to the edge, or even round the corner out of sight.

Hymn STF 362 - Meekness and Majesty

Meekness and majesty manhood and deity
In perfect harmony the Man who is God
Lord of eternity dwells in humanity
Kneels in humility and washes our feet

*O what a mystery meekness and majesty
Bow down and worship for this is your God
This is your God*

Father's pure radiance perfect in innocence
Yet learns obedience to death on a cross
Suffering to give us life
Conquering through sacrifice

And as they crucify prays Father forgive
*O what a mystery meekness and majesty
Bow down and worship for this is your God
This is your God*

Wisdom unsearchable God the invisible
Love indestructible in frailty appears
Lord of infinity stooping so tenderly
Lifts our humanity to the heights of His throne

*O what a mystery meekness and majesty
Bow down and worship for this is your God
This is your God
This is your God*

Prayers of intercession

Loving Lord,
Your word tells us that You are with us wherever we go.
Today, we hear about Mary and Joseph,
And how they had to make a journey,
To escape from King Herod.
Today, when many people will be travelling
To visit loved ones,
We pray for travellers everywhere.
Lord of all, **Hear our prayer**

Today is Sunday,
And Your people will be going to church.
Some will be struggling through bitter weather;
Some will be facing danger;
Some will be preaching Your word;
Some will be journeying only in their minds,
As they cannot leave their homes.
Be with them all as they seek to be faithful to You.
Lord of all, **Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who have had to cancel today's travel arrangements,
Because of sickness or other problems.
May they have help in their difficulties.
Help them to know
That even though their plans seem to be spoiled,
You are still with them.
Lord of all, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who have had to cancel today's travel arrangements,
Because of sickness or other problems.
May they have help in their difficulties.
Help them to know
That even though their plans seem to be spoiled,
You are still with them.
Lord of all, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, some of us do not have journeys to make today.
Whether we travel elsewhere or stay at home,
May we remember that You are with us.
Help us all to keep travelling with You.
Lord of all, **Hear our prayer.**
Amen

Hymn STF 350 - I cannot tell

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
Should set his love upon us, now or then,
Or why, as shepherd, He should seek the wand'ers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know that he was born of Mary,
When Bethlem's manger was his only home,
And that he lived at Nazareth and laboured and
So the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
As with his peace he graced this place of tears,
Or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
The crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy laden,
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
And he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
And some glad day his sun will shine in splendour
When he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
When, at his bidding, every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation
When all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer,
"At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King."

Closing prayer

God of Love,

You are with us in every transition and change.

As we enter this new year with excitement and even some anxiety,

We recall your deep compassion, presence and abounding love.

Be with us as we move forward, rejoicing with you and supporting one another.

We ask this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

(Prayers adapted from IDEAS)