

Christ Church, 20 Nov. 2022.

**Call to worship** (inspired by Luke 1:68-79)

Lift up your hearts, people of God,  
for the Lord has looked favourably upon us  
and is sending us his beloved son.  
God is raising up for us a mighty saviour  
in the house of his servant David.  
God is showing the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered the holy covenant,  
the oath sworn to our ancestors Abraham and Sarah,  
that we might serve God without fear.  
As we prepare for the season of Advent  
We follow John the Baptist -  
the voice crying out in the wilderness.  
Dawn will break upon us and give light to those who sit in darkness.

**Hymn** The God of Abraham praise R&S 121 omit v3 & 5

The God of Abraham praise,  
who reigns enthroned above;  
Ancient of Everlasting Days,  
and God of Love;  
Jehovah, great I AM!  
by earth and heaven confessed;  
I bow and bless the sacred name  
forever blest.

The God who reigns on high  
the great archangels sing,  
and "Holy, holy, holy!" cry  
"Almighty King!  
Who was, and art the same,  
and evermore shall be:  
Jehovah, Father great I AM,  
we worship thee!"

The God of Abraham praise,  
at whose supreme command  
from earth I rise and seek the joys  
at his right hand:  
I all on earth forsake,  
Its wisdom, fame and power;  
and him my only portion make,  
my shield and tower.

The whole triumphant host  
give thanks to God on high:  
'Hail Father, Son, and Holy Ghost',  
they ever cry;  
Hail, Abraham's God and mine!  
(I join the heavenly lays),  
all might and majesty are thine,  
and endless praise.

Thomas Olivers

**Children's Time – Crowns**

**Gifts**

Holy One, all that we have comes from you. Accept our gifts for your work in the world,  
and to you be the glory and praise always. **Amen**

**Hymn** Praise my soul the King of Heaven R&S 104 omit v4 H. F. Lyte

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
To his feet your tribute bring.  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Evermore his praises sing.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise the everlasting King!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame he knows.  
In his hand he gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Widely as his mercy flows!

Praise him for his grace and favour  
To his people in distress.  
Praise him, still the same forever,  
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Glorious in his faithfulness!

Angels, help us to adore him;  
Ye behold him face to face.  
Sun and moon, bow down before him,  
Dwellers all in time and space.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise with us the God of grace!

## **We say the grace as the children leave for SundayClub**

### **Opening Prayer**

O God, as we prepare again to welcome your Son in the season of Advent  
Come once again, and feed your flock like a shepherd.  
Come once again, and gather up the children, the oppressed,  
the sick, the lonely, the humble, and the rejected of the earth.

Turn our hearts to the least of your children,  
for if we lose them, we also become lost.  
Forgive us when we do not care for others,  
when we are selfish and do not bring your Good News.  
Reconcile us to you and to those we have hurt.

On this Christ the King Sunday, as we look forward to Advent,  
join us together with neighbours, with strangers,  
and especially with our own household.  
Bring us to your light in our time of darkness,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Hymn** Crown him with many crowns R&S 262

Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy chosen king  
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save;  
his glories now we sing  
who died and rose on high,  
who died eternal life to bring,  
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Son of God,  
before the worlds began:  
and ye, who tread where he hath trod,  
crown him the Son of Man;  
who every grief hath known  
that wrings the human breast,  
and takes and bears them for his own,  
that all in him may rest.

Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified;  
All hail, Redeemer hail!  
for thou hast died for me:  
thy praise shall never, never fail  
throughout eternity.

Matthew Bridges

### **Bible readings:      Jeremiah 23:1-6                                  Luke 23:33-43**

Today's Gospel reading seems incongruous for the time of year – it is more usually read around Easter – until we remember that today is Christ the King, the Sunday before Advent. Jesus, as we know, was a very different 'king' from the rulers of his day, or even of what we think of as a king today. He was poor. He lived under an oppressive regime. He had been a refugee as a child. And he came to totally subvert and upend the system under which he lived – both the Jewish religious system, and the legal and justice system of the Roman Empire.

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“Save yourself!” The Roman soldiers say as they mock him on the cross. They must have been confused to witness someone known by others as King of the Jews hanging on a cross and being crucified. Roman crucifixion was only perpetrated on people of the lower classes who were not Roman citizens. People of the higher classes were not treated as severely, and certainly were not reprimanded or punished publicly. If Jesus was true royalty, he would not have been crucified on a cross. Even if Jesus somehow had ended up on a cross, as a person with authority in those days, he would have had the power and influence to secure his own deliverance. He would have been able to buy or negotiate his freedom – his royalty would have been a Get of Jail Free card. They probably mocked Jesus because it was obvious to them that Jesus could not be the person some claimed him to be. He could not be a king, as they understood kings – someone with power and authority, out to save his own skin, not to suffer for others.

While we can critique the Roman justice system for its class bias, we could also apply some critique on our own justice system. People with power are not prosecuted as severely as those who are poor. I don't think I need to mention any examples, I'm sure you can think of some, but certain politicians and princes spring to mind. People who are white, middle class or wealthy are not convicted as often and sentenced as severely as are Black people and those who happen to be poor. There is also a very high percentage of people with mental health issues in our prisons. If we believe that God is the creator and sustainer of all and is a God of justice, we should allow this text to remind us of the many disparities within our own justice system.

Jesus asked God to forgive, without naming those for whom he was praying. It is easy to think that he was likely praying for forgiveness for the Roman soldiers who were carrying out his persecution. He knew they were only cogs in a larger system and power structure that was ultimately responsible for his death. But Jesus the Son of God was also born and raised as a Jew in the Roman Empire. He knew how the Roman legal system worked. He knew that in order for him to be crucified, there had to be cooperation with others who were willing to carry out his prosecution. Ultimately, Jesus was executed by the Roman government, but with the help of Jewish leaders who cooperated with the Romans by bringing charges against him. Remember that Pilate washed his hands of the affair, it was the council of the chief priests who demanded Jesus be killed. Since Jesus understood the systems at play, his prayer for forgiveness was for everyone who in any way participated in his crucifixion. He asked God to forgive them because they did not know what they were doing. They did not know that he was the Son of God. In fact, for them, that was his main

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crime – blasphemy, claiming power that belonged only to God. They did not know that his death would fulfil a greater purpose.

Just as God forgave those who crucified Jesus, God will forgive us. God knows we are all products of interrelated webs of power and influence. God knows that we have been socialized into structures and social mores that form our beliefs about race and ethnicity, class, gender, education, political and religious beliefs – that we are moulded and manipulated by the media. God knows that our actions are influenced by our beliefs and our beliefs are often flawed. However, being products of our environments does not exonerate us of responsibility for our actions and from experiencing the consequences of them. Being forgiven means that God forgives us and will give us the strength and determination to repent and live up to our obligations to live life anew.

In the same way that Jesus was mocked by the Roman soldiers, he was also mocked by one of the criminals hanging beside him. It was ironic that a criminal mocked an innocent man for being under a sentence of condemnation. While one criminal mocked Jesus, the other criminal confessed his sins and asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. And we know that Jesus promised to give the second criminal, a place with him in paradise. What we do not know is what that second criminal believed Jesus' kingdom of God actually was. What did it look like? What did it feel like? Was it earthly or heavenly? Would Jesus have to die to attain it or did the second criminal expect Jesus to defy death even as he suffered on a cross? We cannot know what the second criminal had in mind when he mentioned the kingdom, but we do know what Jesus thought the kingdom would be.

In Luke chapter 4, Jesus told the crowds who were following him that he was sent to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. Earlier, he had stood in the synagogue and read from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

The kingdom of God for Jesus was a world where those on the bottom of society would find liberation from the systems and structures that bind them. Those who were captive, like the two criminals with whom he was crucified, would be released. We are God's servants – we should seek to embody the kingdom that Christ proclaimed. This includes forgiving and advocating for those who are caught up in the web of an unjust justice system. It includes providing a warm space for people who can't afford to heat their homes, as we are starting on Thursday. At the URC Building Forum meeting I attended this week, we were given

information about the national warm space initiative that the URC is supporting. We were told how churches should be involved in this scheme, but that we should not let it become the norm in the way that foodbanks have become much more a part of life and their usage has grown. We were encouraged to speak out about the injustice of energy companies making huge profits, whilst churches and other charities are filling the gap for those people falling through the cracks of our society's safety net.

Next week, I along with some of the other church leaders of Rayleigh will be going to see our MP in Westminster. If there are local or national issues that matter to you as Christians that you want us to take to that meeting, please let me know.

We rightly praise Christ as our King – we sing hymns of praise addressing him as a king, but let us remember what kind of king Jesus was; what kind of kingdom he proclaimed, and that as his followers we are called to make that kingdom a reality.

**Hymn** Let all mortal flesh keep silence R&S 454

Let all mortal flesh keep silence  
and with breathless awe come near;  
contemplate the Lord of heaven  
present with his people here.  
In the bread and wine, receive him:  
Christ the Lord, whom we revere.

Praised by all the hosts of heaven;  
praised by all created things;  
every righteous soul, each prophet,  
Martyr and apostle, sings  
Praise and glory in the highest,  
Glory to the King of kings!

Glorious king of endless ages,  
dwelling in God's holiness:  
loving human nature dearly,  
grieving for our wickedness:  
formed within the womb of Mary,  
born to bear our wretchedness.

Six-winged seraphim extol him,  
veil their faces, over-awed,  
cherubim all-seeing, praise him:  
Holy, holy, holy Lord!  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Christ, eternally adored!

Liturgy of St James, tr. Alan Gaunt

**Lord's Supper**

We remember, as we come to this table, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.

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He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.  
He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.  
He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.  
For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.  
And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.  
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,  
to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.  
For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people  
on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

Lord God, send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,  
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,  
and we may be ready to live for you  
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this is remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

### **Sharing of bread and wine**

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.  
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.  
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living  
may be part of the life of your kingdom,  
and that our love may be your love  
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **Prayers of intercession**

Holy One, enthroned in glory over all creation, you are a shepherd to the lost and the least.  
Teach us to see your face among the poor - feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty,  
welcoming the stranger, providing warmth and friendship for those who need it,  
visiting those who are sick or in prison so that we may share in your eternal kingdom  
prepared from the foundation of this world; through Jesus Christ, who is coming to reign  
with justice, compassion, and love.  
God, we pray for the church,  
that we might do our best to present ourselves to you as you would wish us to be.  
Grant us the strength to be your hands in the world, making your kingdom a reality  
In this year of Jubilee, we pray especially for all leaders in the URC, the Synod moderators,  
our Eastern Synod and our local church leaders and all the people of God, striving to follow you.  
O God, in your might you rule forever,  
and your eyes keep watch over the nations.  
We pray for our nation, our community, and all in authority.  
Grant them wisdom to navigate the times ahead for the benefit of all people,  
being especially considerate to those who cannot work due to illness or disability,  
those dependent on benefits, and those having to choose between heat or food,

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and those going hungry so that their children can eat.

Gracious God, all the earth bows down before you, and sings out your name.

We pray for the nations of the earth, that your peace may protect us all.

We pray especially today for peace in Ukraine, and all other areas of conflict around the world, and all places around the world affected by climate change, thinking particularly of the situation in Sudan with millions of people at risk of starvation.

We pray for the COP27 climate conference, that it will result in meaningful actions to stop the climate crisis.

Grant us the wisdom to play our part in protecting your creation in our personal lives and in how we manage our church building to be as sustainable and eco-friendly as possible.

Jesus Christ, our Sovereign and Saviour, you pour out your power for the powerless and your salvation for the lost, help us to do the same.

Remember us in your new creation,

so that we may live in peace with you in the presence of the Holy One. Amen

### Lord's Prayer

**Hymn** Great praises shout to God on high (Luke 1:69-79, Song of Zechariah)

Tune – On Christmas night all Christians sing

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Great praises shout to God on high  
for he has brought salvation nigh!  
For young and old, for rich and poor,  
God's great salvation's at the door!

*Dawn of salvation shining bright,  
flood our lives with your glorious light!*

This help God promised long ago,  
through prophets seeking truth to know,  
explaining then how he had come  
to kindle hope for ev'ryone.

To Abraham, God promised true  
the things he's now begun to do.  
His covenant is now fulfilled –  
the rescue that he'd always willed.

From enemies all fired with hate  
he'll save – our kindness vindicate;  
from fear and failure set us free,  
and make us who we ought to be.

And you, my son, prepare the way  
for he who brings this wondrous day.  
Through him God makes a way to heav'n;  
through him are all our sins forgiv'n.

So shine, great dawn of hope and joy,  
and death's dark shadow now destroy.  
Through Jesus, bring us our release  
and guide us in the paths of peace

### Blessing

It is not enough to acclaim Jesus Christ as our Lord and King.

Our mission in life is to make his kingdom a reality among us

and to bring it to those around us by our words and deeds.

The way to do this is to live as he lived:

for others, in love and service.

May almighty God bless you for this task:

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

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