

# **Christ Church United Reformed Church, Rayleigh**

## **Service**

**10.00 on Sunday 31 December**

**Call to worship:** Praise him, kings and all peoples, princes and all other rulers; young women and young men, old people and children too. Let them all praise the name of the Lord! His name is greater than all others, his glory is above earth and heaven. **Praise the Lord! (Psalm 148 vv11-13)**

**Hymn: WF23** “Fill your hearts with joy and gladness”

- 1) Fill your hearts with joy and gladness  
sing and praise your God and mine!  
Great the Lord in love and wisdom  
Might and majesty divine!  
He who framed the starry heavens  
Knows and names them as they shine.
- 2) Praise the Lord, His people, praise Him!  
wounded souls his comfort know;  
those who fear him find His mercies,  
peace for pain and joy for woe;  
human pride and power laid low.
- 3) Praise the lord for times and seasons,  
cloud and sunshine, wind and rain;  
spring to melt the snows of winter  
till the waters flow again;  
grass upon the mountain pastures,  
golden valleys thick with grain.
- 4) Fill your hearts with joy and gladness,  
peace and plenty crown your days  
love His laws, declare His judgements,  
walk in all His words and ways;  
He the Lord and we His children –  
Praise the Lord, all people praise.

**Children's time:** The story of Simeon and Anna

**Collection**

**Hymn: WF 42** “If I were a butterfly”

1) If I were a butterfly,  
I'd thank you Lord for giving me wings,  
And if I were a robin in a tree,  
I'd thank you Lord that I could sing,  
And if I were a fish in the sea,  
I'd wiggle my tail and I'd giggle with glee;  
But I just thank you Father for making me “me”

*For you gave me a heart,  
And you gave me a smile,  
You gave me Jesus and  
You made me your child  
And I just thank you Father for making me “me”*

2) If I were an elephant,  
I'd thank you lord by raising my trunk,  
And if I were a kangaroo,  
You know I'd hop right up to you.  
And if I were an octopus,  
I'd thank you Lord for my fine looks,  
But I just thank you Father for making me “me”.  
*For you etc.*

3) If I were a wiggly worm,  
I'd thank you Lord that I could squirm.  
And if I were a billy goat,  
I'd thank you Lord, for my strong throat.  
And if I were a fuzzy wuzzy bear,  
I'd thank you Lord for my fuzzy, wuzzy hair;  
But I just thank you Father for making me “me”  
*For you etc.*

**Prayer:** Heavenly father, we come before you to give thanks for all the things we have sung about in our first two hymns – the dark skies filled with stars and the blue sky during the day filled with light, the seasons of the year spring for sowing and planting, summer for growing and

tending, autumn for reaping and the winter for its time of rest before it all begins again. We give you thanks for everything that you created on our planet, the insects, the reptiles, the birds and the animals and above we give you thanks for creating us in your image. We also give thanks, in this season of Christmas for the birth of your Son, the baby Jesus, born into a human family yet still your Son and still the hope of the world in the days to come. We give thanks for your forgiveness when we say sorry firstly for all the things that we have said or done that have not pleased you and secondly for all the things we have not done not helping someone who would have appreciated whatever help we offered or perhaps staying silent when a kind word would have meant so much.

**Amen**

And now we continue with the Lord's prayer:-

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. **Amen**

**We shall say The Grace as the children leave for Sunday Club.**

**Reading: Psalm 148**

**Talk 1**

Here we are at the end of yet another year, looking backwards to 2023 and forward to 2024. Here too we are almost at the last of the psalms. A lot of praising has been done here at Christ Church over advent and then Christmas Day. Many of the psalms were written to praise God, but it seems that in Psalm 148 we are building up to a grand finale of praise. How appropriate then that our Lectionary places this reading on the first Sunday after Christmas Day, where our praise not only includes stories involving people, like Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men, but also includes all the animals in the stable including cows and sheep.

This psalm praises all that God has done and the psalmist makes it very clear that everything has been included from the highest heavens to the depth of the seas. Sometimes I feel that we forget that we, or at least our ancestors are also part of that creation. St Francis of Assisi declared that in celebration of Christmas all animals should be given twice their normal feed. I wonder if that includes us for it certainly seems that over

Christmas Day and Boxing Day we seemed to eat vast amounts of food, certainly more than we would eat normally.

Of course Francis is most famous for his relationships with the animals, but in his *Canticle of the Creatures*, he painted some unusual pictures calling the Sun and Moon his paradise, for after all that was what God had initially created, that we have lost over many centuries to the point that I suspect non-religious people and even some religious folks see us as all important beings lording it over everything else, being a dominating force, not only on earth, but even in our galaxy. We have paved over that which God created which was called Paradise and hung in its place all things electric from modern gizmos to electric cars.

Francis did not speak of flowers, he spoke to the flowers just like our own King Charles does and was made fun of for doing so! When he walked by a field he would talk to the stalks of corn, or if he passed a bubbling brook he would talk to that, always exhorting the plants and animals to worship God their creator.

At this time, during the winter of 1224-5, Francis was physically in poor shape, almost blind, lungs riddled with tuberculosis, in constant pain and exhausted by the cumulative effects of travelling and rigorous fasting. I am sure that if I had been in his position I would have been begging God to make me better as well as the things around me. But not Francis oh no! He asked instead for the grace to bear his ailments patiently. God's reply was to promise him a great gift, a treasure that began to take shape in consonants, vowels, syllables and musical notes as he began to write a song of eloquent rejoicing in the delights of God's kingdom – 2 and again he wrote "Be praised my Lord, for the blessed Brother Sun who gives the day and enlightens us through You" and again for Sister Moon and the stars, formed by You so bright, precious and beautiful" So began Psalm 148's most beautiful stepchild.

As we look back at a year that had some very good parts, but equally very bad parts, maybe, as we move forward into 2024, we should be trying to regain our relationship with the Creation, that we have lost and St Francis of Assisi had in bucket loads and regain our wonder in the nature that surrounds us every day and night for in doing so we may understand ourselves and others better and move forward to repair the damage caused by self-worship of ourselves as over lords of everything and remember that God created us in his image, to be custodians of the Earth, not its masters. AMEN

### **Hymn R&S 135 “Joy to the world”**

- 1) Joy to the world the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
And heaven and nature sing.
- 2) Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!  
let all their songs employ;  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
repeat the sounding joy.
- 3) No more let thorns infest the ground,  
or sins and sorrows grow;  
wherever pain and death are found  
He makes his blessings flow.
- 4) He rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of His righteousness  
and wonders of his love.

### **Reading: Luke Ch. 2 vv22-40**

#### **Talk 2**

This new testament passage contains a lot of information and I think I could spend a couple of Sundays, if not more in unpicking it all. However, this morning I want to concentrate on Simeon and Anna.

In some ways it feels straightforward, but in others not. The reading at verse 25, tells us That Simeon was a good and God-fearing man, who was waiting for Israel to be saved. As I think I have mentioned before, the Jews thought of themselves as God’s chosen people, but realised that as a nation they could not reach for or attain world supremacy through human means. Most of the Jewish people believed that there would arise another king of David’s line, who through celestial intervention, would revive all the old glories.

In contrast to this, though there were a few people, known as the Quiet in the Land. They had no dreams of violence and of power and of armies with banners that would overcome their enemies, instead they believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God would come to them. All their lives they waited quietly and patiently upon God. Simeon was of their number. He was faithfully waiting for God to come and the Holy Spirit has promised him that he would not die until he had seen. He recognized God in the baby Jesus and was ready to depart this life in peace. Indeed, Simeon gives us a brief summary of what lay ahead for Jesus.

Firstly, He would be the cause of the falling of many. A strange statement is it not, yet it is not so much God judging us but us judging ourselves. You might say that if faced with our Lord and Saviour, our heart runs out in answering love, that we are within the Kingdom. However, if we are immune to him or even are openly hostile to him, we are condemned.

Secondly he will be the cause whereby many will rise. It is the hand of Jesus that lifts us out of the old life and into the new.

Lastly, He will meet with much opposition and of course we know that the current religious leaders were terrified of him and thus opposed him. Towards Jesus, despite what many think there is no neutrality for either surrender to him or are war with him.

Now we come to Anna, who also was one of the Quiet in the Land. Of Anna, all we know is what we glean from verses 36-40. We know that she was a widow, but although she had known sorrow, she had not grown bitter (ring a bell with St. Francis?). Sorrow is one of these things that can alienate us from our faith, but it also has the power to make us stronger. I remember a lady who had known me all my life commented that the sorrow and grief of losing my late partner had made me stronger, but without my faith that certainly would not have been true.

We know also that she was old – 84 years old, positively ancient in the terms of the average life span of the time. Age can always take away the bloom and strength of our bodies. The years can kill the hopes we once cherished and we become resigned to things as they are. It depends on how we think of God, for if we think of him as distant and detached we may well despair, but if we think of him as intimately connected with life, as having his hand on the helm, we too will be sure that the best is yet to be and the years will never kill off our hopes.

So how had Anna become as she was. Simply because she never ceased to worship, having spent all her life in God's house with God's people and she had never ceased to pray. Public worship can be extremely uplifting, but private worship is also great.

So what can we draw from these people, the psalmist who wrote psalm 148, St. Francis, who wrote his beautiful Canticle of the Creatures, Simeon and Anna? They all had one thing in common their praise and worship of God the creator of all things from the highest heavens to the bottom of the deepest seas. They had retained that very important link between God and themselves which strengthened their faith and certainly enabled both Simeon and Anna to live in the knowledge that they would see God's son before they died.

My wish for 2024 is that we become more like them, steadfastly recreating and strengthening the link between our Father in Heaven, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and allowing our faith to direct us down the path God wants us to go, rather than the one we think he wants us to take. But in addition be like Simeon and Anna, waiting for the light in the form of Jesus and their wait and faith were rewarded.

AMEN

### **Hymn WF 65 "Longing for light, we wait in darkness"**

Longing for light, we wait in darkness,  
Longing for truth, we turn to you  
Make us your own, your holy people,  
Light for the world to see

*Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts  
Shine through the darkness  
Christ be our light  
Shine in your church gathered today.*

Longing for peace, our world is troubled,  
Longing for hope, many despair Y  
Your word alone has pow'r to save us,  
Make us your living voice.  
*Christ be our light! etc.*

Longing for food, many are hungry,  
Longing for water, many still thirst  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
Shared until all are fed.  
*Christ be our light! etc.*

Longing for shelter, many are homeless,  
Longing for warmth, many are cold  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
Walls made of living stone.  
*Christ be our Light! etc.*

Many the gifts. Many the people,  
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
making your kingdom come.  
*Christ be our light! etc.*

### **“Glory to God” (Handel’s Messiah)**

### **Prayers of Intercession (Keith)**

### **Hymn R&S 188 “Born in the night, Mary’s child”**

1) Born in the night, Mary’s child, a long way from your home, Coming in need, Mary’s child, Born in a borrowed room.	2) Clear shining Light Mary’s child your face lights up our way; light of the world, Mary’s child, dawn on our darkened day.
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3) Truth of our life,  
Mary's child,  
You tell us God is good,  
prove it is true,  
Mary's child,  
go to your cross of woods.

4) Hope of the world,  
Mary's child,  
you're coming soon to reign;  
King of the earth,  
Mary's child,  
walk in our streets again.

### **Dismissal**

**Sung blessing WF 69** "May God's blessing be upon you now"

May God's blessing be upon you now,  
may you know of his great love for you,  
May God's blessing be with you now,  
Right where you are.

**Repeat twice.**