

Creationist 2.0

Be Bold

18 December 2022

Call to Worship – Psalm 80

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!

Stir up your might, and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O LORD God of hosts,

how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

Restore us, O God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,

the one whom you made strong for yourself.

Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Once in Royal David's city

Cecil Frances Alexander

Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall:
with the poor, and mean, and lowly,
lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
thro' his own redeeming love;
for that child so dear and gentle
is our Lord in heav'n above:

and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see him, but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high;
when like stars his children crowned
all in white shall wait around.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

What is love, God?

What is it about us that so desperately craves
this strange, impossible to define thing
that is love?

How do we love, God?

When we don't understand this thing
that is love?

Who do we love, God?

The world feels unsafe, and it is so easy to get hurt
We are afraid that if we risk love
it will be tossed back at us
floundering and gasping like a fish on the shore

Then where will we be?

Will we be unloved?

Will we be alone?

Will we become...nothing?

Yet. You love, God.

You love us, God.

You love me, God.

Thank you for loving me, for loving us

Thank you for never leaving us, for always loving us

For making me, us, something.

Forgive us for those times we withhold our love. From you, from those around
us. For fear, for hurt, for anything at all.

We bring our private confessions to you now.

May the Father of all love and mercy cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image,
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Notices

The Peace

Reading

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Reflection

What courage does it take to be a Joseph? Think about it for a moment. You have been brought up with a set of ideals and values. Everything about your entire life has been ordered by those ideals and values. Your friends and family all live by those ideals and values. You do what you do because you believe it is the right thing to do. You fit in because what you think and what you do fits with everyone around you. You are glad when people around you are successful and do well at whatever they put their hand to doing. You frown when people around you screw up and make mistakes. But still you put your hand out and help them up to continue on with life. You have a good life. You feel secure in who and how you are. And now you are about to be married. How good is that? You are looking forward to having a wife and then a family. Then comes the punch to the gut. The feeling of being hollowed out, of everything about your hopes and dreams shattered. It turns out that your betrothed isn't as pure as she claimed she was. She is pregnant and it sure

wasn't you that got her that way. But you didn't get this far in life without learning to do the right thing, even in the face of adversity. And the right thing here is to not make life any more difficult for her than it already is. You will send her away quietly and not make a fuss.

Then an angel appears and tells you this crazy story about her being pregnant from the Holy Spirit and what his name will be and how he will save his people from their sins. That just doesn't happen to normal people with normal lives. It just doesn't make a lot of sense. Worse, what will people think? What will my friends and family think? What will happen to my good, safe, secure life?

So Joseph is presented with a choice. It is a difficult choice. A choice that on the one hand will let him continue to be Joseph, worker of wood, maker of things, family man, upstanding member of the community. And on the other, to be Joseph, man of no fixed abode, finding work where he can, with few friends and family far away. But husband of a special wife and dad to a very special child.

There is a boldness in Joseph's choice. It doesn't matter that an angel appeared to him in a dream. No amount of flash dreams makes the choice easier. To choose to take on being father to Emmanuel, knowing what that would bring was brave beyond words. I think, on this day, as we look toward the birth of that little boy, it does us well to be reminded of Joseph's bravery. Reminded of the fact that without Joseph the Christmas story may have had a very different ending. I know we can say, 'It's all right, God has it in hand.' That is true. And God works through people like you and me and what we do with God's working matters. Just like Joseph we have choices to make, and the net result of those choices can reverberate far beyond what we see or even imagine. Today, as we look toward Christmas, may you be bold in your response to God's call on your life. May you be a Joseph in your moment and time.

We Pray

Heavenly Father, you placed an incredible burden on Joseph. We thank you that he chose to be bold in response. Help us to be people who are equally bold in our response to your call on our lives. Help us to count the cost and choose strength in following you. And teach us to support each other in our walk toward you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

He is exalted

Twila Paris

He is exalted, the King is exalted on high

I will praise Him

He is exalted, forever exalted

And I will praise His name

He is the Lord. Forever His truth shall reign

Heaven and earth

Rejoice in His holy name

He is exalted

The King is exalted on high

Offering

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/>

Holy God of hope and promise: when the children were in deep despair, you promised them a sign, the indication of a Saviour coming into their midst. As we bring you our tithes and offerings this day, so many of us are discouraged, trying to find our way. We need your sign, we need your Son, not as simply a reminder of history but as a new direction, a revolution of love that starts in our hearts, a resurrection of compassion that looks beyond self and the accumulation of more and more things that don't satisfy. We need what only a Saviour can give us. Guide us by your signs on this day and as we begin the journey to Bethlehem once again. In the Saviour's name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For the weak and lowly trapped in the warring of opposing powers

For the tired and broken lost in a sea of debt and inequity

For the sick and the lonely longing for the comfort of a kind word

For our loved ones, our families, our friends, those lost to us

These things we pray through Christ who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, holy be your name

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as 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

It came upon the midnight clear

Edmund Sears

It came upon a midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains,
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
and hear the angels sing!

For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendours fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we find the courage, the boldness to step into that scary place of walking alongside Jesus...

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.

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