

Creationist 2.0

Christmas Day

25 December 2022

Call to Worship – Psalm 96

O sing to the LORD a new song;

sing to the LORD, all the earth.

Sing to the LORD, bless his name;

tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations,

his marvellous works among all the peoples.

For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;

he is to be revered above all gods.

Worship the LORD in holy splendour;

tremble before him, all the earth.

O come all ye faithful

Oh, come, all ye faithful,

Joyful and triumphant!

Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.

Come and behold him,

Born the King of angels;

Oh, come, let us adore him;

Oh, come, let us adore him;

Oh, come, let us adore him,

Christ, the Lord.

Reading

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while

Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered.

⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family

of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to

deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Reflection

Everyone on the move. Shopping centres full of frantic, last-minute shoppers, people finishing work and heading off to the beach, to see family, to the favourite camping spots. Long lines of slow moving traffic as everyone tries to head off at the same time for the same places. There's just no escaping the fact that when everyone is trying to do the same thing at the same time it is tedious. Tempers fray, patience evaporates and the potential for fights grows.

And that is to say nothing of those who dwell in the lower rungs of society. The \$2 shop is a stretch and as the kids long for the latest \$500 Xbox, the real question on their lips is how they can afford to pay for food this week. Holidays are simply those times when the kids get into trouble at home instead of at school – there is no heading off with the caravan or to the family crib – they couldn't afford the petrol anyway. Anything over and above existing is a chore and even existing gets difficult at this time of the year.

Spare a thought for Joseph and Mary. Him out of work. Both of them travelling, slowly and likely painfully. Nowhere to stay and no way to pay if there was. Looking forward to the baby being born, perhaps one less thing to worry about, although probably more added along the way. No midwife. No medical team. No sanitary measures. Just a robe laid on the dirt floor for the child to be born.

We sing about a silent night, a baby that doesn't cry, angels singing, stars in the sky, shepherds and wise men and donkeys and it all sounds so delightfully domestic and blissful. Likely nothing could be further from the truth of that time. This family has more in common with those wondering how to pay their power bill and put food on the table than it does with those fighting for the last box of Roses at the supermarket and heading off for a lovely holiday by the lake. There are perhaps some who can relate. I know that I have never experienced anything like that. Perhaps Jesus' arrival is a message in itself. How do I see myself before this king born in poverty and chaos?

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Sunshine and rata blossoms

Snow and pine trees

Tinsel and glitter

Wrapping paper and cellotape

Those who celebrate Christmas welcome this day

For others it is merely a regular day in their week

Forgive us for the assumptions we make about our celebrations. It is so easy to forget that while Christmas can be a time of joy, it can also be a time of sorrow, of anger, of disappointment, or even a time of nothing much at all. We live in a multicultural world, yet we often get tunnel-vision, thinking our way is the only way.

Help us, God, to be a people who listen for those around us. Who seek not to be understood, but to understand. Who live and work for the sake of genuine peace, not of the political nature, but between human beings, finding common ground as your creatures in this amazing world.

We bring our private confessions to you now...

Our God fulfils his promises and is true to his word.

We have confessed our sins.

God has forgiven us,

because Christ died for us. Amen.

O come all ye faithful

Sing, choirs of angels,

Sing in exultation;

Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!

Glory to God,

Glory in the highest;

Oh, come, let us adore him;

Oh, come, let us adore him;

Oh, come, let us adore him,

Christ, the Lord.

Reading

Luke 2:8-14

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel

said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”

Reflection

Amidst the fight for survival comes a brief pause. A moment in time when we get to listen for what God is saying and doing. There is a sense of peacefulness when you think about a group of shepherds, out in the wilderness, settling in for the night. The darkened sky clear overhead, the sheep quieting and sleeping. Talking about where they have been today, where the grazing might be best tomorrow. Which sheep need an eye kept on. Plans for when they get back to town. It’s not a luxurious life, but it is likely a peaceful life. Sure there is the occasional wild animal to scare away, but following the sheep and caring for their needs has a rhythm to it that feeds the soul. It’s easy to know if you are doing the right thing by the health of the sheep and a steadily growing flock.

I can imagine a level of dismay when that tranquillity is shattered by a rowdy bunch of angels lighting up the night sky. For one thing, everyone is settled and ready for sleep. For another, whenever someone says, ‘Do not be afraid,’ that is surely a sign that you should be afraid! And another, ‘Who goes around talking about Saviour’s and Messiahs?’ Now, I think it is likely that most shepherds would be fairly hardened characters and so they can probably pull together a modicum of control and begin thinking about what to do next. But really, this is all just weird. Angels and signs and singing – you wouldn’t read about – if you were able to read, that is. And why us, of all people? There are much smarter people, people with money, people with power, people with education. None of this makes sense. And now they want us to go and have a look? What about our sheep? We can’t just leave them here. Are the angels offering to look after them?

Don’t think that Jesus comes to sing gentle lullabies and speak soothing words to give us peace. No, Jesus comes to interrupt and disrupt. Jesus comes at inopportune moments and breaks through our serenity to call us to action. I’m not sure how I feel about that at Christmas.

O come all ye faithful

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n.
Son of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing;

Oh, come, let us adore him;
Oh, come, let us adore him;
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Christ, the Lord.

The Peace

Reading Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.

Reflection

Chaos, poverty, disruption, and interruption. This salvation thing is beginning to sound painful. Not only that, but our reading from Titus is enough to make the puritans go all gooey and happy. Renouncing impiety and worldly passions, being self-controlled, upright and godly. On the surface of it we might replace the description with the words boring and unapproachable. I'm not sure I signed up for that when I asked Jesus to be my God and Saviour. So, I have to ask what is going on here? How do I read this, not simply to suit my preferences, but so I understand what God is attempting to tell me and you today?

I find myself thinking about the fractious shepherds, and the cast-out parents in the stable. I am quite sure that the rest of society would have seen them as impious, uncontrolled, and quite the opposite of upright and godly. All of which begs the question, 'Whose lens are we looking through?' Let me ask some other questions.

Is it impious to find God in nature?

Is it uncontrolled to sing and dance in God's presence?

Is it the opposite of upright (is that downright?) to ignore your cultural norms and bring a child into the world that is of somewhat problematic origins?

What exactly is godly?

What is the difference between worldly passions and passionate faith?

How can I live my best life, with all my heart and soul and mind and strength? Surely that means bringing my every talent and skill to bear, whether that be gardening or carpentry, sewing or chatting, singing or listening, laughing or crying, texting or talking, writing or running, golfing or cooking, you get my drift. I suspect the point Paul was making to Titus was to live life well, being careful to not be caught up in dumb stuff, but to put everything he had into being the best he could be.

Perhaps that is the underlying message of Christmas. Rather than a list of don'ts it is a list of dos. Do be the person you are created to be. Be the best you can be. Be full of life and hope and joy and love and share what you have with everyone you meet. Then it seems to me that you will be at your most godly and upright, ready to meet Jesus.

We Pray

God of the outcast, the poor, the unhappy, God of shepherds and carpenters and unwed mothers, God of chaos and disruption and interruption, we come. We come to learn to be the best we can be in the midst of a life that seems to be more muddled and confused than ordered and certain. This Christmas, as we ponder the disruption caused by the arrival of your Son, open our hearts to the life and hope and joy and love he brings to all of us. Through the Jesus of Christmas, we pray. Amen.

Joy to the world

Isaac Watts

Joy to the world, the Lord has 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

Offering

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

Great God, our Redeemer, we sing your praises. Your glorious love shines in the face of Jesus, born a babe in this dark world. We marvel that he generously humbled himself to bring salvation. How precious is your gift of love! Let the light in our sanctuary and our songs of praise spill through the windows to neighbours dwelling in darkness. May our gifts and offerings reflect the light of Christ and, as beacons in the night, draw people far and near closer to you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For those greeting Christmas cold, hungry, afraid
For those greeting Christmas as another disappointment amongst a sea of disappointment
For those greeting Christmas at work
For those greeting Christmas alone
For ourselves as we greet Christmas

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who is 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

Come and join the celebration

Valerie Collison

Come and join the celebration
It's a very special day
Come and share our jubilation
There's a new King born today

See the Shepherds
hurry down to Bethlehem
Gaze in wonder at the Son of God
who lies before them...

Wise men journey
led to worship by a star
Kneel in homage, bearing precious gifts
from lands afar. So...

"God is with us," to the world
the message bring
He is with us! "Welcome!"
all the bells on earth do ring...

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we be filled with life and hope and joy and love...

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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