Home Service Sheet for Sunday 1st December 2024

Call To Worship: Isaiah 42:5-9

Thus says God, the Lord,

    who created the heavens and stretched them out,

    who spread out the earth and what comes from it,

who gives breath to the people on it

    and spirit to those who walk in it:

“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;

    I will take you by the hand and keep you;

I will give you as a covenant for the people,

    a light for the nations,

    to open the eyes that are blind,

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,

    from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the Lord; that is my name;

    my glory I give to no other,

    nor my praise to carved idols.

Behold, the former things have come to pass,

    and new things I now declare;

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, You invite all Your people to walk with You without fear of stumbling. Your mighty arm enough is enough to steady the feeblest soul. Your grace is sufficient to rescue us should we fall and cry out to You in faith. Grant us faith enough to take You at Your Word, to know that when our hearts are heavy and the destination seems so distant that You are there with us along the road. Forgive us for those times when we have doubted Your Word, and tried to do things our way instead. Whenever we feel alone, may You draw us ever closer to You and to Your Church. Help us this day and in the days to come to sing Your praises and glorify You through the way that we live, for we ask this in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Hymn: Come, Thou long-expected Jesus by Charles Wesley

<https://youtu.be/WBGx_4PxO3g?si=ZtMQFLLk-yeu3oDK>

Come, thou long expected Jesus,

born to set thy people free;

from our fears and sins release us,

let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,

hope of all the earth thou art;

dear desire of every nation,

joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,

born a child and yet a King,

born to reign in us forever,

now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit

rule in all our hearts alone;

by thine all sufficient merit,

raise us to thy glorious throne.

The 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 that 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: Luke 2:21-32

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

  “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,

    according to your word;

  for my eyes have seen your salvation

    that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

   a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

     and for glory to your people Israel.”

Reflection

When we read the Scriptures today, we do so from our own vantage point. In other words, we read them as Christians living in Twenty First Century Britain. There are certain things we tend to notice or look out for in the Bible. We must also remember that as Christians we have the Holy Spirit living inside us, and He will help us to understand and apply the Word to our lives. Yet, there are some things that are not so obvious to us today, as they would have been to those who were reading them in the First Century AD. We tend to miss the significance of certain Jewish practices, and our Bible reading today certainly contains some.

The Lord Jesus was born into a devout Jewish family who knew and practiced the law of God. As Christians today, we do not practice the purity sections of the law as they have been fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ. We no longer need to avoid mildew on tent flaps or mixed fibres in our clothing because we have been made pure by Jesus’ death on the cross. However, we need to note that Jesus’ human family followed these laws and presented the young child to the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem. This was an act of purification (v.21). Jesus, as the firstborn male child that Mary had, was considered holy, or dedicated, to the Lord.

God gave the following command to Moses after the Israelites had left Egypt, but before they had crossed the Red Sea. “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” (Exodus 13:2) This is connected to the death of the firstborn males, which was the tenth plague that God visited upon the Egyptians. The Israelites had smeared the blood of lambs on the doorposts of their homes which caused the angel of death to pass over their homes. Jesus was not simply a firstborn son who was holy to God, His Father. He would become the perfect Passover Lamb whose blood shed on the cross would cause God’s judgment to pass over those who have faith in His Son.

There is a great deal of symbolism here, which would be easy for us to miss. Not only that, but a sacrifice must be made by the priest, in accordance with the Law. Luke tells us that this was to be “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:24) The explanation for this is given in Leviticus chapter 12, “And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, and he shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” (Leviticus 12:6-8)

One bird was to be a burnt offering, and the other a sin offering. Note how the provision for both offerings to be birds is made for those who are poorer. In other words, this is evidence that Mary and Joseph were poor. Then Luke introduces us to a man named Simeon. We have very little information about him, but what we do learn is quite significant. He is described as righteous, or holy and devout, which we should understand as a good Jewish man. We are also told that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel, which tells us that he knew and understood the Scriptures. Finally, we are told that the Holy Spirit rested upon him.

God had clearly spoken to Simeon, and revealed that he would see the promised Messiah before he died. By faith, Simeon saw the infant Jesus and knew that God had fulfilled His promise. If you like, Simeon had faith that Jesus was the One whom God had announced would come to save Israel, through the Old Testament prophets. He understood that Jesus would be a light to all nations including the source of salvation for all in Israel who would believe in Him. In our reading today we see three good examples of godly devotion to follow – Mary and Joseph, and then Simeon. May we, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit, seek to be like them. Amen!

Prayer

Almighty God, as the new day dawns on this Advent Sunday, we give thanks for the first glimmers of the light which remind us of the coming of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We believe that Your light has the power to overcome all our darkness and pray that throughout this season of Advent we may share in the mystery of Your coming into the world. Father God, although we are sometimes separated by language and culture from the people we live amongst, our hope for our community is to see Your will done here on earth as it is in heaven. We pray for our neighbours, that through our words and actions we might clearly show our Christian faith and witness to the Lord Jesus. Gracious God, we pray for those who are ill, lonely or distressed and especially those without hope for the future. We pray for healing, wholeness and hope in their lives. Help us to bring life and love, joy and hope, to those who live in despair. Hear our prayer, O Lord, for we ask these things for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, amen.

Benediction

Loving God, may hope live in our hearts that we might share the hope of Christ with all whom we meet. May we share hope by noticing the humanity of others, by listening to someone else’s story and by praying for our world. In this Advent season, help us to see, feel, and share hope with others. Amen.