**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 17th November 2024**

**Call To Worship:                Isaiah 9:6-7**

For to us a child is born,
    to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
    and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
    Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
    there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
    to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
    from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

**Opening Prayer**

Loving Lord, no matter how many times we read of the wonder of Your coming into this world as the Word made flesh, it fills us with amazement and praise. Lord, we worship You in the beauty of holiness and bow down before Your throne of grace in wonderment, for holy is Your name. From before the creation of the world You set Your purposes and plans and throughout history You have been fulfilling them. When Your Son, the Lord Jesus, returns in glory all things will be fulfilled and we will then be with You forever. Praise be to Your Name forever, O Lord, amen!

**Hymn:**                        **Just as I am**by ***Charlotte Elliott***

[*https://youtu.be/XvOj1VpNICI?si=A7V7p-P02WHcX0XE*](https://youtu.be/XvOj1VpNICI?si=A7V7p-P02WHcX0XE)

Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou biddest me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt,

Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched blind; sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come!

**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 2:1-7**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

**Reflection**

Over the past several weeks we have been working our way through Luke chapter 1, following the parallel stories of Elizabeth and Mary. John has already been born to Elizabeth and Zechariah, and now the time has come for Jesus to be born to Mary. There is, however, a bit of an issue as Mary was living in Nazareth, but God had given the prophet Micah a prophecy that stated that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). How was this going to happen? In one sense, this is quite straightforward because God is in control of all things, and this was His plan. However, various things needed to happen in order for God’s purposes to be fulfilled.

So, how would God ensure that Mary was in the right place at the right time? In modern times the distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem is not too far, being about 90 miles and taking 2 hours to drive there in a car. However, in the ancient world this would have taken several days walking, which is not exactly ideal for a heavily pregnant girl. God, however, used the power and processes of the Roman Empire to compel Mary, and her fiancée, Joseph, to make this journey. Roman censuses were usually taken every 5 years or so to gather information for the purpose of taxing people and knowing how many people there were in all parts of the empire.

Joseph was from the family line of David, and because of this he had to travel to the town of David which is Bethlehem. That is how things worked, certainly in the Roman province of Judea at that time. It was another way in which the Romans could make it clear that they were in charge, and everyone had to jump whenever they said, ‘jump’! Luke gives us some useful historical information too, which helps us to date the census. He says that it was the first one taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Scholars date this census to 6 or 5 BC, whilst Herod was still alive.

So now we have Joseph travelling to Bethlehem with Mary. They arrived for the census and then it was time for Jesus to be born. This was God’s plan, that He had foretold hundreds of years before. Jesus would be the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God and Prince of Peace that Isaiah prophesied He would be! Yet even then there were difficulties. The Son of God was not born in a palace, or even a comfy house. Rather, He was born in a stable or barn because there simply were no free rooms available in the town. Jesus had a very lowly birth and was laid in a manger (animal feeding trough) for His first bed.

Before we move on into the other events that happened around the birth of Jesus next week, I want us to pause and consider the humble background of Jesus’ birth and upbringing. We know that He was born in Bethlehem and spent time in Egypt, but many considered Him to be a Nazareth lad. There is a really good illustration of what people thought about folk from that town in John’s Gospel. Nathaniel asks Philip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) There is a clear implication that Nazareth was a bit of a dodgy backwater that produced ruffians and scoundrels. Jesus’ reputation would have been lowly and humble.

Even so, this was God’s purpose. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Philippi, writes about the Lord Jesus as our example to follow. He tells us that Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:6-8) Just as Jesus was humble and laid down His life for us, so we too are to be humble and be willing to lay down our priorities, our own interests and even our lives for one another and for the sake of the Gospel. Amen!

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You for the way that You blend together the plans of men and the processes of this world to fulfil Your perfect plan of redemption for all who love You. Thank You, that there is nothing that can happen in the world today that You cannot use to perfect Your plans and purposes. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on You and trust You in all things, knowing that when the enemy comes in like a flood, You will lift up a standard against him and use it for our good. We pray too for those who find themselves in humble situations, perhaps in poverty or without a home. May You provide for them the shelter, food and care that they need. Help us, as Your people, to have the same attitude of humility and love as does Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose Name we pray, amen.

**Benediction**

Gracious God, keep us humble in Your sight this day. May the mind of Christ be found in us at all times and in all circumstances that we may point others towards the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and bring glory to Your Name, amen.