**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 22nd December 2024**

**Call To Worship:                Micah 5:2-5a**

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
    who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
    one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
    from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
    when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
    to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,
    in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
    to the ends of the earth.
And he shall be their peace.

**Opening Prayer**

Loving God, we thank You and praise You today for all Your promises that are ‘yes’ and ‘amen’ in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank You for sending Him here to Earth to live and die for us that our sins may be forgiven and that we may receive eternal life. Father we praise You for Your great love, mercy and compassion that You have shown to us, and for revealing Your Son to us. Help us to follow Your Son with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength in praising You. This we ask in His precious Name, amen.

**Hymn:**                                  **What child is this** by *William Chatterton Dix*

<https://youtu.be/xRfPUrsnejg?si=tveWLqgeum273KtJ>

What Child is this, who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping?

Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ the King whom shepherds guard and angels sing

Haste, haste to bring Him laud; the Babe, the son of Mary!

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh, come, peasant, king to own Him.

The King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone Him!

Raise, raise a song on high; the virgin sings her lullaby.

Joy, joy for Christ is born - the Babe, the son of Mary.

This, this is Christ the King whom shepherds guard and angels sing;

Haste, haste to bring Him laud, the Babe, the son of Mary!

Nails, spear shall pierce Him through; the cross He bore for me, for you.

Hail, hail the Word made flesh - the Babe, the son of Mary!

**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:                    Hebrews 10:1-10**

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
    but a body have you prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
    you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
    as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

**Reflection**

As we come to the end of Advent, the season of hope-filled waiting for the fulfilment of God’s prophetic promises, our focus shifts towards the first coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. Today we will be looking at a more obscure Bible passage from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews. If we were to sum up the purpose of this reading we might say that it is to tell us why Jesus came into this world. The reason that Jesus, Himself gives us is that it was to do the Father’s will. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Micah, He did so in order to obey the will of God the Father.

In the midst of the Christmas story, marvelling at the birth of a special child we can easily lose sight of the reason for Jesus coming to this Earth in the flesh. As wonderful as the visits of shepherds and magi were, they pale into insignificance compared with Jesus’ ultimate purpose as the all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews begins by showing us that the law was simply a dim shadow of the goodness that would come through Jesus. Year by year, under the old covenant, the same sacrifices needed to be made, not because they were effective in paying the price for sin, but rather because they were ineffective.

Sin is such a serious matter with God that it demands a blood sacrifice. Yet, in verse 4, we are told that the blood of animals was not enough to appease our holy and righteous God. A perfect sacrifice was required, and so from the very beginning God planned to provide that very sacrifice Himself. Our reading shows us that Jesus knew what He would have to endure for our sakes. Although Jesus did identify with us by taking on flesh and experiencing the pains and temptations we do, this was not why He came. The Father prepared a human body for His Son that He might become the once for all, completely sufficient sacrifice for us.

Our Bible reading also reminds us that this was no spur of the moment thing with God, but rather was planned out well in advance. God’s salvation plan was announced by the prophets hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem in great detail with complete accuracy. All of the previous sacrifices that had been made according to the written law were made in obedience to the law. However, this was not what God has ever desired from His people. Rather, He has always required obedience, but this was simply not possible as all human beings are fallen and sinful. God alone is holy and without sin. The law simply shows us that we need help.

Jesus’ death on the cross did not just pay the price for our sin, although it certainly did that. His sacrifice did not simply reconcile us to our Heavenly Father and reverse the curse that was placed on Adam, although it did that. Jesus’ sacrificial death has sanctified us also, making us holy in God’s sight. Through the work of the Holy Spirit within us we are also in the process of being made holy little by little over time until we are presented before the throne of judgment as pure in Christ. Jesus’ death did away with the need for animal sacrifices for sin and offerings to appease the Lord. The new covenant, sealed by His blood, did away with all that and gave us access to the Father.

So how are we to respond to what we have read today? Firstly, let me suggest that this should turn our hearts towards expressions of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus for His obedience to the Father’s will by which He died for us. Secondly, it shows us that there is nothing we can do to put us right with God, because Jesus has already done it all on the cross. Thirdly, Jesus is our great example, showing us that obedience is better than sacrifice or offering. In other words, although we have been forgiven, this should not be an excuse for us to ignore God’s will, but rather an inspiration to follow Him more closely. Amen!

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You and praise You for sending Your Son to obediently do Your will, dying on the cross to pay the price for our sins. We ask today that You would help us to live in grateful obedience to You more and more each day. Remind us of our reliance on the sacrifice of Your Son, and may that inspire us to share the good news of the Gospel with those around us who have not yet been saved by faith in Your Son. Build Your Church, O Lord in this nation and throughout the world. Help us not to get caught up with the commercialisation of Christmas this year, but enable us to keep our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus. This we ask in His Name, amen.

**Benediction**

Now to Him who is able to strengthen us in accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,but now revealed and made known through the Scriptures, so that all the world might know salvation. To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.