Home Service Sheet for Sunday 8th December 2024

Call To Worship: Psalm 107:1-3

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,

    for his steadfast love endures forever!

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,

    whom he has redeemed from trouble

and gathered in from the lands,

    from the east and from the west,

    from the north and from the south.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, You sent Your only Son into this world. Through Him and His finished work on the cross we are Yours; chosen, loved, embraced, saved by Your love and grace, welcomed into Your family and precious in Your sight. You came, as a Shepherd seeking lost sheep so that You might bring them home. Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Saviour and Messiah to all who would heed Your call. To You belongs all the praise, all the honour, all the glory and all the power! Amen!

Hymn: Hail to the Lord’s Anointed by James Montgomery

<https://youtu.be/_mCCwBqiQdk?si=cppOE1tQfsGR1jJ->

Hail to the Lord’s Anointed; great David’s greater Son!

Hail, in the time appointed, His reign on earth begun!

He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,

To take away transgression, and rule in equity.

Anointed One, and Saviour! He comes to those in need;

And mercy, peace and favour descend their souls to feed;

He gives them songs for sighing, their darkness turns to light,

Whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in His sight.

Kings shall fall down before Him, and gold and incense bring;

All nations shall adore Him, His praise all people sing:

For He shall have dominion o’er river, sea, and shore,

Far as the eagle’s pinion, or dove’s light wing can soar.

For Him shall prayer unceasing and daily vows ascend;

His kingdom still increasing, a kingdom without end;

The mountain dews shall nourish a seed in weakness sown,

Whose fruit shall spread and flourish, till time itself has run.

O’er every foe victorious, He on His throne shall rest;

From age to age more glorious, all blessing and all blest,

The tide of time shall never His covenant remove;

His name shall stand for ever, that name to us is Love!

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 2:33-40

And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him.

Reflection

One of the saddest trends that I sometimes see in church fellowships is the devaluing of older people. Some people seem to think that once you get to a certain age, you can no longer have an important part to play in the life of the church, but this is wrong! Age, in of itself, should never disqualify us from serving God through the life of a local church fellowship. The Bible gives us positive examples of individuals whom God called and empowered for specific tasks, even though others may have thought they were too old or too young.

In our Bible reading today we read about two mature believers, Simeon and Anna. Simeon is often assumed to have been quite old, although Scripture does not specifically tell us that. It hints at his age through the promise that God gave him that he would see the Messiah before he died. Anna, however, is “advanced in years” (v. 36) and a widow of 84 years old (v. 37). We can safely conclude that both Simeon and Anna were more mature believers who still had a God-given purpose in their lives. They were also devout people who had heard messages from the Lord. Anna was a “prophetess,” whilst Simeon was a righteous and devout man.

These are the people to whom God revealed the identity of His Son, the Messiah. He began with shepherds and then spoke to two devout Jewish folk in Jerusalem. According to Matthew, God also revealed His Son to some magi from far away lands. This is an unusual combination of people, including faithful Jews, rough farm workers and royal pagans from lands afar. This should tell us that Jesus came to save sinners from all walks of life and nations, male and female, old and young. We should be encouraged that no-one is beyond the saving power of God’s grace in the Gospel!

Anna “began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” (v.38) Like Simeon before her, God had revealed to Anna exactly who this baby was, and what He would go on to achieve. Anna responds in two specific ways, and it is these that I would like us to focus on now. Firstly, she praised and thanked God. Note how Luke says that she ‘began’ to praise God. In other words, this wasn’t simply a one-off quick prayer of thanksgiving, but rather the start of such praise and thanks to God. This example should cause us to stop and think about our own praise and thanks to the Lord. Is it an ongoing part of our relationship with God each day, or just something we do as a brief part of our daily prayers? Do we recognise all that God has done for us each day and give Him the glory He deserves?

Secondly, Anna told other people about God’s salvation plan that He would fulfil through this new-born baby, Jesus. This is how Luke describes it, “she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” We could, in a sense, say that Anna was spreading the good news about Jesus. From the knowledge that she had she spoke about God’s plan of salvation to those who would listen. We too need to tell others about God’s gracious plan of salvation and the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In the final two verses of our reading today, we see the wider context of Mary and Joseph being obedient to God’s law. They did all that was required of them for their newborn son. From here they returned to Nazareth in Galilee, where Joseph lived and worked. Luke does not mention either the magi or the period spent in Egypt in his account of Jesus’ birth. It is most likely that the events Luke describes come first with the journey to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus and the visit of the shepherds. Within a few days the family go to Jerusalem and then return home to Nazareth. Then at some point after this the magi are led to Jesus, and following that God guides the family to Egypt to avoid the murderous intentions of King Herod.

Luke glosses over this period in verse 40, writing, “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him.” This covers several years of Jesus’ childhood, and gives us simply what we need to know. I suspect that many of us would like to know more about Jesus’ childhood, but the Spirit of God who inspired Luke knew that this was not necessary. Rather, all we need to know is that Jesus grew, developed, became wise and that God’s favour or grace was upon Him throughout. Let us concentrate on the details that matter in the Gospel story and through this give God the glory He deserves. Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we struggle to fully understand that God the Son would lay aside His heavenly glory and be willing to come to earth, be born as a little baby, and live a perfect life, so that He could die a sacrificial death for the sin of the world. Thank You for His wonderful example of obedience to You and thank You that He showed to us how to live a life that was totally dependent on You. May each of us, like the Lord Jesus, grow in grace and increase in wisdom and understanding, for Your praise and glory. We pray that we would learn to say, without hesitation, "In all things, Thy will not mine be done." Amen.

Benediction

Loving God, You sent Your Son to save the world. As Jesus’ people today, give us grace to be humble as Jesus was, so that when He returns we may be ready to greet Him with great joy. We ask this in His Name and for His sake, amen.