

Morning Worship for Sunday 3 January 2021

from the United Reformed Church at
Morpeth, Widdrington and Gt Bavington.

Opening Words

Welcome, from wherever you may be, as we join together in this act of worship today. And a Happy New Year! It is the start of the new year and we are filled with hopes and perhaps some fears for the year to come. So we come at this very special time of year, to look to God and remember all that he has done for us, and how he will travel before us in the year ahead.

Sing: Fill Your Hearts With Joy And Gladness,

Fill Your Hearts With Joy And Gladness,
Sing And Praise Your God And Mine!
Great The Lord In Love And Wisdom,
Might And Majesty Divine!
He Who Framed The Starry Heavens
Knows And Names Them As They Shine

Praise The Lord, His People, Praise Him!
Wounded Souls His Comfort Know.
Those Who Fear Him Find His Mercies,
Peace For Pain And Joy For Woe;
Humble Hearts Are High Exalted,
Human Pride And Power Laid Low.

Praise The Lord For Times And Seasons,
Cloud And Sunshine, Wind And Rain;
Spring To Melt The Snows Of Winter
Till The Waters Flow Again;
Grass Upon The Mountain Pastures,
Golden Valleys Thick With Grain.

Fill Your Hearts With Joy And Gladness,
Peace And Plenty Crown Your Days!
Love His Laws, Declare His Judgements,
Walk In All His Words And Ways;
He The Lord And We His Children,
Praise The Lord, All People, Praise!

Based on Psalm 147

©Timothy Dudley Smith

Copied under CCLI License 45325

Prayer

God,
In the middle of the night you came into our world
silent, unnoticed, inconsequential.
In that stable was born all our hopes and fears

for the future, and Mary cradled them
all in her arms.

In the middle of the world,
in a generation with limited means of communication,
your Word was uttered and given voice.
And yet it still went unheeded,
silent, unnoticed, inconsequential.
In that far away country all our hopes and fears
for the future, and a handful of followers
cradled them in their hearts
and wrapped them in the scriptures.

In the darkest times of the year you come
to each successive generation, who
remember your words and reaffirm the
promises of our faith.

And yet still your kingdom grows
silent, unnoticed, inconsequential.
In this our town, our community, our country
are all our hopes and fears for the future,
and we your church
cradle them in our prayers
and wrap them in our worship.

May we today be encouraged that you hold
all our hopes and fears and continue to work
out your purpose
in us and through us and for us.
So that we may go from this place
to speak and live your Word so that
others may hear and notice and understand: "God is
with us"

AMEN

Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-14

Reading: Psalm 147:12-20

Sing: Tis winter now; the fallen snow

Tis winter now; the fallen snow
has left the heavens all coldly clear;
through leafless boughs the sharp winds blow,
and all the earth lies dead and drear.

And yet God's love is not withdrawn;
his life within the keen air breathes;
his beauty paints the crimson dawn,
and clothes each branch with glittering wreaths.

And though abroad the sharp winds blow,
and skies are chill, and frosts are keen,
home closer draws her circle now,

and warmer glows her light within.

O God, you give the winter's cold,
as well as summer's joyous rays,
you warmly in your love enfold,
and keep us through life's wintry days.

Samuel Longfellow

Reading: John 1: 10-18

Poem: "Shine On" by Dave Hopwood

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not understood it.
Not comprehended,
not grasped the full meaning
of the light of God brought close in his Son.
The light shines on and the darkness struggles to know it,
the darkness in me,
the darkness in you.
The light hounds us,
chases us with its concern and laughter,
nudges us like an interested puppy,
butts up against us in the quiet,
jostles us in a crowd.

The light shines on, though darkness makes itself known.
The noise of darkness,
the threat of darkness,
the posturing presence of gloom.
But that still small voice,
that thin sight of silence,
that often invisible presence,
goes on.
God in the gaps.
The light shines on.

© Dave Hopwood
copied by permission

Sermon

New Year is a time for resolutions – a time to look forward and dream about the person we would really like to be, or the things we want to do. Whether its planning a holiday, or starting a diet, making a resolution to break a bad habit, or give up alcohol for January, or to give up smoking once and for all, to walk the distance from Lands End to John O Groats or to reunite with old friends who you have lost touch with – this seems to be a time of year when people look forward and imagine the things the future holds in store for us.

Usually I do set a few resolutions. I make a particular effort to drop some bad habits and adopt good ones. These usually do not last long. All those hopes that I have for a different me usually fall by the wayside and remain unrealised. Last year, more than most, the hopes and expectations we had going into the year, were suddenly and dramatically quashed with the pandemic that swept the world. Holidays were cancelled, weddings postponed, family gatherings went on line. Our many hopes and expectations fell by the wayside and faded into distant memories.

As the years have passed though, I find that the hopes I have going into the new year are more for my children that they are for me. The new year becomes less about the ways I want to change myself, but the hopes that I have for my children in the year to come, and what I can do to help those hopes and dreams come true.

I wonder that your hopes and resolutions are for 2021?

My eldest sons are both in their exam years – so much of my hope revolves around the schooling they have already missed, and still might receive and how that might affect the exam results they might attain. Elliott leaves school this year and my hopes are for the next stage of his particular career path. My hopes for the year to come, are hopes for my children rather than for myself.

I am sure that many of you who are parents will recognise the hopes that you might have for your children, and the resolutions you might have made to do what you can to enable them to fulfil their hopes.

The opening of John's gospel reminds us that Jesus, as the Word is part of the Holy Trinity, was with God in the very beginning. So it would be wrong in some ways to think of Jesus, as part of the Trinity, not existing before that first Christmas. But, there is something quite special about this idea of God becoming a Dad when Jesus was born. Joseph would have had all those same feelings that most fathers have felt when their children are born. An overwhelming sense of love, the responsibility of care, they hopes and dreams at what this child would grow up to be.

Perhaps, God had some of those feelings too. Seeing his Son, born that night, cradled in the loving arms of this peasant girl that had been favoured, and under protection of this older man who would be his earthly

father. Perhaps God had some of those same feelings, those same hopes and fears for this child as he grew.

And not just in that one, his firstborn in Bethlehem, but perhaps for all his children.

The words of Jeremiah might echo with us, who feel like we have been through some sort of exile, with the isolation from friends and family during these times of lockdown. As we look forward to the Spring and the hope of being reunited and being able to live freely again, the hopes and fears of the people of Israel returning from exile resonate with us.

In the passage from Jeremiah God says "For I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." We see how God holds hopes and fears for his children, the nation of Israel, and how he might also hold those same hopes and fears for each of us, his children.

In the Psalm it uses these wonderful wintry words to outline what God does, and hopes for his children.

In this season of winter, we might look forward in hope to the Spring that is to come. But it is not the hopes and expectations that we might have for ourselves that are important – for we know all too well how those can fall by the wayside and remain unfulfilled.

But it is the hopes and expectations that God holds for us his children. In those can have confidence, for God's purpose will be fulfilled.

Let us look forward in hope for the year to come, not at what we might do in our own strength, but what God might do in us and through us and for us.
AMEN

Poem: "Reaching Down" by Dave Hopwood

Lord you reach down into our darkness,
into the pits and the traps others make for us,
into the mire and mess we make for ourselves,
into the despair and disappointment of this difficult world.

You reach down and step into our darkness,
making yourself small,
making yourself like us.

Not distant, not holding back
but walking every difficult mile
every foot-wearing journey
of this Emmaus life.

Every Calvary Road, every Valley of Shadow,
you take the stones in our shoes
and place them in yours.
You limp beside us.

Quietly, silently, often in the guise of others,
in the hands and feet, tears and smiles
of friends and strangers,
and in the profound name and caring presence of
the Man of Sorrows,
the Prince of Peace,
the Son of Man:
Jesus.

© Dave Hopwood
copied by permission

Prayers of Intercession

Lord God,
Father of us all,
we bring before you at this time of year
all that has gone before and all that will be.

We thank you for your abiding presence in the year
that has been.
We have faced loss, loneliness and disappointment.
All that we hoped for was not realised.
Our dreams fade with the going out of the past year.

We remember those among us who have passed away
into the care of your eternal keeping....

We remember those who have faced health problems
both physically and mentally and pray for
their continued healing and wholeness....

We remember those who have lost jobs
and faced financial difficulties.....

We remember our children and the disruption
to their lives and development in ways yet to become
evident....

All that has gone before we lay before you now.
We offer it to you in prayer
so that we may not be hampered by the past
but equipped for our futures.

We offer you all our fears, anxieties and hopes for the
year to come.
For those who have received or waiting vaccinations,
we pray
that they may be released from prisons of anxiety
and regain lost hope for the future.

We give thanks and continue to pray for all medical

Blessing

staff,
care home workers, and home carers... for all those
who
sacrifice their own well-being for the needs of others.
In them we see sacrificial love that we are all
encouraged to demonstrate.

We pray for our country and our economy,
with the uncertainty and challenges that Brexit brings,
and the devastation done by this coronavirus.
We look forward with hope to the spring emerging
from the winter,
for new opportunities for employment
and a rebuilding of our communities.

We Lord do not know what the year ahead will bring,
but we are certain that there will still be poor to be
given a helping hand,
there will still be the sick to be cared for,
there will still be others in our lives, whose own life on
this earth will come to an end.

We step into this new year,
safe in our father's love,
in the knowledge you tread the way before us.
and that we can never be separated from your loving
care.

We offer all our prayers today, in Jesus' name,
who taught us to say together.....

Our father....

Sing: Have faith in God my heart

Have faith in God my heart
trust and be unafraid:
God will fulfil in every part
each promise he has made.

Have faith in God, my mind
although your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan
than you can fully know.

Have faith in God, my soul,
his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.

Lord Jesus, make me whole;
grant me no resting place,
until I rest, heart, mind and soul,
the captive of your grace.