**Home Service Sheet Sunday 31st December 2023**

**Call to Worship:**                  **Psalm 148:1-6**

Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
    praise him in the heights!  
Praise him, all his angels;  
    praise him, all his hosts!

Praise him, sun and moon,  
    praise him, all you shining stars!  
Praise him, you highest heavens,  
    and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord!  
    For he commanded and they were created.  
And he established them forever and ever;  
    he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

**Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, at all times and in all places You deserve the praise, glory and thanksgiving of all people. Your Word reminds us that if human beings will not utter Your praise then creation itself will cry out in worship. Lord, You have made everything in the world around us, from the smallest of elements to the largest of mountains. The very heavens declare Your glory and we ask today that You would help us to join in that wondrous symphony of praise. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness to proclaim that You alone are God and You alone deserve our wholehearted praise! To You alone be the glory today and always, amen.

**Hymn                                     Joy to the world**by ***Isaac Watts***

<https://youtu.be/XdIW0mN4lhQ?si=V_itzszKdkNAz9XW>

Joy to the world! the Lord is come; let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing,

And heaven and nature sing, And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns; let men their songs employ;

While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,

Repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;

He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found,

Far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness, and wonders of His love,

And wonders of His love and wonders, wonders of His 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 2:22-40**

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 servantdepart 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.”

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**

For over a month now the focus in many churches will have been the birth of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem. In one sense this is quite understandable as we have just celebrated Christmas. On the other hand, though, our focus on Jesus should be on more than His birth. Christmas is about the incarnation (God coming in human flesh) to save humanity from sin and eternal death. Christmas is about remembering that Jesus was sent by the Father to open up the way to life everlasting. Christmas can also remind us that God gave us the law, and through His Son, Jesus, He fulfilled the law so that we don’t have to face the punishments laid down in the law.

Our Bible reading today begins by showing us that the law of Moses was fulfilled by Mary and Joseph with regard to Jesus. They brought Him to the temple and made the prescribed purification sacrifice. As the firstborn son He would automatically be dedicated to God, and no lamb is sacrificed to buy Him back. It is important to note that Jesus came to fulfil the law, rather than abolish it. The law remains in place, and those who break the law are still subject to the punishments God has laid out, or at least that is the case for those who are not in Christ. For those of us who have faith in Jesus, His obedience and sacrifice is applied to us so that we enter eternal life because of what Christ has done.

Luke goes on to show us that the signs that pointed to Jesus’ identity were recognised by two people at the temple that day. The first of these is a man named Simeon, about whom we know very little. He is simply described as righteous, devout and having the Holy Spirit on him. Simeon was clearly as good a Jewish man as was possible, although he was not perfect. Nonetheless he had been given understanding of God’s salvation plan revealed in the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit had also revealed that he would see the promised Messiah before his death. Simeon’s words show us that he understood the significance of who Jesus was and what He would go on to accomplish.

There are some interesting details in what Simeon said. This salvation that would come through Jesus was not just for the Jews, but for the gentiles also – in other words it is for all who will believe, regardless of race or sex. He also says that “this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed”. This points us towards the fact that not all people will believe in Jesus and be saved by Him. Some will rise to eternal life, and others will fall to the depths of the pit as they reject Jesus as Saviour and Messiah. Simeon also speaks of Jesus being opposed, which we will go on to see time and again throughout the gospels.

Luke then introduces us to a second person at the temple in Jerusalem. Anna is described to us as an elderly prophetess from the tribe of Asher. Her life was centred on the temple and the worship of God, and specifically fasting and praying. Luke does not record for us exactly what she said, but rather tells us that she thanked God for Jesus and spoke about him to all who were interested in God’s plan of salvation. We should perhaps note that it is those who were truly devout or focused on serving God who recognised that Jesus was the Messiah. Also we can note that this information was not kept for themselves only but was shared.

Clearly there are some lessons for us to learn here, and some examples to follow. Firstly, the good news of Jesus is for all people, but not all people will receive it. In other words, some people will reject the Gospel message, but this should not put us off sharing the Gospel. Secondly, we should note the kind of people who are singled out in this reading, and seek to be like them. In Christ we should still seek to be devout, law-abiding disciples who worship and serve God all the days of our lives. Thirdly, we should not keep the good news of the Gospel to ourselves, but rather we should share it with other folk that they might hear it and be saved. Amen!

**Prayer**

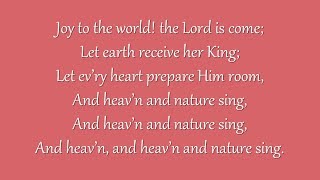
Heavenly Father, we can scarcely take in the wonderful truth that Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ,  would lay aside His heavenly glory and be willing to come to earth and be born as a little baby. In Your Word You have revealed that Jesus lived a perfect life, so that He could die a sacrificial death for the sin of the world. Thank You for His wonderful example of obedience to You and thank You that He showed us how to live a life that was totally dependent on You. We pray that like the Lord Jesus, we would each grow in grace and increase in wisdom and understanding, for Your praise and glory. We pray that we, and all Your people, would learn to say, without hesitation, "In all things, Your will not mine be done." Help us to follow Jesus’ example in laying down our lives and desires for the sake of others that they might gain eternal life. In Jesus’ Name we pray, amen.

**Benediction**

Almighty God, send us out now with Your peace, knowing that we have met with Christ, our Saviour. May we go now to watch, to wait, and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the very ends of the world, that Your Kingdom would come more fully here on earth just as it already is in heaven. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.

Attachments area

[Preview YouTube video Joy to the World (Grace Community Church)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdIW0mN4lhQ&authuser=0" \t "_blank)

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