

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

The First Sunday
of Christmas
29th December 2024
The Revd Phil Nevard

Prayer of Approach

It may feel like the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind make moan ...
but we have come to worship and our hearts are wanned.
Our spirits are lifted by the presence of God's Spirit.
Our joy is brightened as we hear the call of Christ.
Our fellowship is strengthened as we gather in His name.
In the bleak mid-winter, we gather to worship God.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him nor earth contain ...
Our God who created the universe cannot be tamed.
Our God who sustains life itself is beyond the reach of mere words.
Our God who is alpha and omega, beginning and end,
is bigger than we can imagine.
In the bleak mid-winter, we gather to worship God.

Enough for him whom cherubim worship night and day -
a breast full of milk and a manger full of hay.
That awesome powerful creator God is born a helpless babe.
The God whom heaven cannot hold is cradled in a mother's arms.
The God whom earth cannot contain is seen and heard and touched.
In the bleak mid-winter, we gather to worship God.

What can I give him, poor as I am? Some money for the offertory?
An hour of my time on Sunday morning?
A few good deeds to keep my conscience clear?
Obedience, faith, belief ... he wants more than that, He wants my heart.
In the bleak mid-winter, we gather to worship God.

*It would be useful to have sung In the Bleak Mid Winter
as the opening carol before these prayers are used.*

Confession and Absolution

Too often we let our hearts grow cold and dark,
to match the weather, rather than face our transgressions.
In the cold dim winter God's light is hard to see,
we long to hear God's promise to unburden our hearts.
God calls us to repentance and offers us the light of Christ.

(moment of quiet)

God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Feel the warmth, feel the sensation of a melting heart; know that you are forgiven, know that you are restored. Thanks be to God

Prayer for illumination

Living God, help us so to hear your holy Word
that we may truly understand;
that, understanding, we may believe
and believing, we may follow in all faithfulness and obedience,
seeking your honour and glory in all that we do;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

All-age ideas

Many people will, if they haven't already done so, soon be packing away nativity sets in their boxes. It can be quite an engaging experience to do this with a congregation – perhaps with an actual set and an actual box. You might want to pause and ask – which characters are missing from the set? Several characters are in there who are not part of the Gospel story, and several are left out who ARE part of the gospel story.. (Rachael, innkeeper, Herod, soldiers...) What would it say to us if we designed a nativity set where they WERE represented? You might want to save Jesus until last and ask – “shall we really put Jesus back in the box now?”

Alternatively, perhaps if you are doing the Colossians reading, you might want to bring some garments from your own wardrobe which now don't fit, or have gone out of fashion, or are there for sentimental reasons. Ask the congregation if they have examples too... what about our spiritual wardrobe? Are there things in our spiritual practice that we have grown out of, no longer fit, are no longer appropriate?

Readings

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 | St Luke 2:41-52

Sermon Notes

Luke 2:41-52 coupled with 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 are very much the stand-out, obvious pairing for a Sunday which comes only four days after Christmas Day! But even in these readings, Jesus is already twelve years old. You may want to spend some time with the congregation thinking about the gap. It's not quite as big a gap as the so-called 400yrs silence between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, but, in a boy's life, it's significant gap! You might want to look up some of the apocryphal legends about Jesus'

childhood days, some of them make interesting reading! Or you might want to spend a bit of time explaining that the gospel writers didn't set out to write a memoir of Jesus' life, we hear none of the funny stories that might have emerged in a wedding speech, for instance! The Gospel birth narratives set the scene for Jesus' Ministry, setting out who he is and locating him in Israel's history of prophecy and expectation.

And so here we have two stories of young boys in the temple, both with faithful mothers who have in some sense offered the children to God. In much the same way as those old exam papers used to invite you to "compare and contrast", the lectionary is inviting us to set the stories side-by-side and have one inform the other. Find a simple structure to help the congregation through that.

Alternatively, you could take Colossians 3:12-17 and couple it with the idea that we are about to embark upon a new year. Some people have already been to the post-Christmas sales or might be planning to do so soon – some take the opportunity to refresh their wardrobes, new clothes / new me! Colossians urges us to "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." And above all to "clothe yourself with love." It may be that the congregation hasn't a huge appetite for a long sermon, so the simple image of changing our spiritual wardrobes might be all they need.

Nunc Dimittis

Now Lord you let your servant go in peace:

Your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation

which you have prepared in the sight of every people:

a light to reveal you to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

This could be said together instead of, say, an Affirmation of Faith or you might listen to a sung version of it as a reflective piece – there's a link at the end of the notes to a royalty free performance.

Offertory Prayer

Church offertory is rarely a plate or a bag passed from person to person these days. It is more likely to be a much more invisible digital bank transfer set to some automatic schedule which is harder for us to notice. What we give to God through the life of our church has always been more than what's in a bag or on a plate – it's all of our acts of service in and through the life of this congregation. So let us give thanks for all of that.

Loving God, You give to us without counting the cost,
You give to us beyond human measure.

Accept these and all our gifts to be used in your service
each and every day. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving and Eternal God,
we give thanks for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ,
who came to dwell among us, bringing light and hope to our world.
As we reflect on the story of Jesus in the temple,
we are reminded of His wisdom, His sense of purpose,
and His deep connection with You, even from a young age.

We pray today for all children and young people,
that they may grow in wisdom and stature,
and in favour with You and with others.
May their homes and communities be places
where they are nurtured and encouraged to explore their faith
and discover the calling You have placed on their lives.
We lift before You parents, guardians, and all who care for children,
asking that You grant them the patience, love, and wisdom to guide them faithfully.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Church, that it may be a place where all are welcome,
where questions are embraced,
and where the teachings of Jesus are lived out in our words and actions.
Help us to be a community that supports one another in our journeys of faith,
and that reaches out to those in need,
reflecting the love and compassion of Christ in all we do.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are lost, confused, or searching for meaning in their lives.
Just as Mary and Joseph searched anxiously for Jesus,
we ask that You guide all who are seeking,
that they may find their way to You.
May we, as Your people, be ready to offer comfort, direction, and hope
to those who are struggling.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We remember before You those who are in need today —
those who are sick, lonely, grieving, or burdened by the challenges of life.

(pause to add names and situations that rest heavy on YOUR heart)

As we carry them in our hearts, we ask for Your healing presence to surround them. May they feel the peace that comes from knowing they are loved and held by You, even in the midst of their difficulties.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Finally, Lord, we pray for ourselves, that like Jesus, we may grow in our understanding of Your will for our lives.

As we stand at the threshold of a new year, help us to be attentive to Your voice, to seek Your wisdom in all that we do, and to be faithful in our calling as Your disciples.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We offer these prayers, those spoken formally out loud and those whispered in the quietness of our hearts in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Blessing

Loving God,
as we go out into your world,
may we know your presence with us
in all the pressures and potential of the coming week.
Help us to leave traces of grace
wherever we are and whatever we do. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
In The Bleak Midwinter	162	305	204	337
Who Would think What Was Needed	178	295	222	
Once In Royal	167	315	214	539
<i>Child in the Manger</i>	150		314	71
All Poor Ones And Humble	165			
Ring A Bell for Peace	152			
Infant Holy, Infant Lowly	149			342
See Him Lying On A Bed of Straw	151	310	216	589
Shepherds Came Their Praises Bringing	156			
What Child Is This	170			749
All creatures of our God and King	39	147	99	7
My Life flows on (How can I keep from singing)		565		