worship notes
from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 27th December 2026
The Sunday after Christmas
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Call to Worship

Come, praise the LORD!
Praise God from the heavens,
praise God in the heights.
Let all of creation, exalt their creator.
Kings of the earth, princes and rulers;
Old, young, God's faithful
and the ones who draw close:
come, all peoples, praise God!

based on Psalm 148

Prayers of Adoration, Confession & Supplication

Awesome God, as the year comes to an end
and a new year dawns on the horizon,
we give thanks again that you came among us:
you took on our human form and humbled yourself
so that we might know you better.
Yet you did more than this:
in sending Jesus Christ
you set about restoring your people
in a way, least expected.
As we joyfully celebration this today,
we also seek forgiveness.
Too often we do not take notice
of the greatest gift of all
because we are caught up in our own gifts.
Too often we do not see
what you have given us
because it is not what we desire.

Silence

The apostle Paul told the church in Galatia:
"When the fullness of time had come,
God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

in order to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we might receive adoption as children."

Galatians 4:4-5

Awesome God, open our eyes to this today.
Let us not just see a child in a manger
but the one who is all the world needs.
Pour out your Holy Spirit,
so that might again know the joy and wonder
of your Word made flesh
that lives among us today and always. **Amen**

Readings

Isaiah 61:10-62:3 | *Psalm 148* | *Galatians 4:4-7* | *St Luke 2:22-40*

All Age Introduction

A new year is on the horizon. Rather than write "new year resolutions" with the congregation, why not get them to think about their "hopes" and "fears" for the coming year. You could start with personal ones but then move on to what they might be for the church and wider community. When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple, we might image they had many hopes and some fears related to being new parents and a new family. But when they met with Simeon and Anna, the hope these two people put in their child must have been mind-blowing. Think about how that may have changed some of Mary and Joseph's hopes into fears. Reflecting on the hope and fears that together you have for your church and community, consider how they might impact your own hopes and fears. For example: if you have a collective hope for growth in the church, does that personally make some people fearful? Why? Conclusion: As people of God, we live in hope because of Jesus Christ. Hope, though, does not come without its fear. It leads to sacrifice. It leads us to sometimes embrace our fears instead of perusing what we hope for.

Sermon Notes

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

The later chapters of the book of Isaiah (chapters 56-66) are accredited by Biblical scholars to "Third" Isaiah, a prophet who was speaking to the people of Israel as they returned from Exile. This, we might think, was a great time of celebration in the life of Israel—all they had hoped for was finally theirs! Unfortunately, reality was quite some way from the dream. The first part of this segment of Isaiah (end of chapter 61), is the prophet giving voice to the community's overwhelming joy of being home and the possibilities this would afford them as a people. Through the prophet, the people were praising God and engaging with this new era of their relationship with God. However, when the people returned to Israel, they did not find a land flowing with milk and honey. It was not the paradise they have been dreaming of in Babylon. They came back to an unwelcoming land, ravaged by

poverty, destruction and corruption. The life they hoped for was not just there; they were going to have to work hard for it. As we observe the prophet's words swing back to being those of God's to the people in chapter 62, there was the encouragement for the people to remain hope filled. It was not going to be easy—they were still going to have to make some sacrifices—but restoration would eventually come.

Psalm 148

On the first Sunday after Christmas, this Psalm echoes the praise sung above the shepherds' heads as the newborn Christ-child was laid in the manger. Evoking the narrative of creation in opening chapters of the book of Genesis, the psalmist draws the whole of creation into this praise of God. It should be observed that although this psalm is so very apt for us on this Sunday, this was not the context in which this psalm was first sung. It was a song that came from another point in the life of God's people, when amid times of struggle, they were being encouraged to remain faithful, for God is far greater than human imagining. As the hope Jesus's birth reignites in the church, that sense of us needing to praise God and live in honour of that praise is important. After all, the reason God took on our human form was because we struggle to do this.

Galatians 4:4-7

These words of the apostle Paul are almost a theological statement for our praise and worship on this Sunday. They proclaim the freedom that Jesus brought which is for all, and the family to which we can all belong. These words may perfectly stand alone for us, and we may choose to use them in this way. However, it worth noting the context in which they were written. In the early church, there was a lot of discourse about whether you needed to be Jewish, before you were Christian. For some time, this was a big argument between Peter and Paul. Peter said "yes", Paul said "no". In the end, God opens Peter's eyes, and there is resolution—there is nothing wrong with the "old ways", but Jesus brings everyone into a new relationship with God that does not require everyone to know the ways of old too. As Paul engaged with the church in the Diaspora, though, this tension between those whose faith has grown from the following of the Mosaic law, and those whose had not was often present. And as in this passage, Paul tried to break this barrier down, although, as this passage too suggests, not always in the most sensitive of ways. At this time of year, what might be best to take from these words is that there is nothing wrong with what we have inherited or the traditions we keep, but there is something more essential for us to focus on: the love of God for all shown to us by Jesus's life, death and resurrection.

St Luke 2:22-40

The Luken narrative of Jesus's beginning, end with the fulfilment of the Mosaic law as Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem for those rites and rituals required of them. In this way, the gospel writer firmly roots Jesus in the Jewish people and history of Israel. Yet, through the eyes of Simeon and Anna, we glimpse that Jesus will be

someone more than another king of Israel. This is not without its complexities. Simeon's discourse with Mary and Joseph, although full of awe and wonder, crushed any hopes that Jesus's earthly parents might have had for him. Equally, Anna's proclamation to the temple that this child, who was from nowhere, was the one who would finally make a nation's hope real, seemly crushed the people's hopes. Hope, though, is different to dreams. We can have hopes and dreams about a future, but they do not always result in the same thing because often dreams lead to expectations that are not always realistic. And this is partly because hope comes from our heart, where dreams come from our imagination. This causes a wrestle and sometimes a sense of hopelessness within us. In the story of Simeon and Anna, though, we are shown another way of looking at this when we rely on and trust God. Our hope will be fulfilled, but maybe not as we expect.

Affirmation of Faith

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being [4] in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overtake it.
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
He was in the world, and the world came into being through him,
yet the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own,
and his own people did not accept him.
But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man, but of God.
And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. Amen

John 1:1-5, 9-14

Prayers of Intercession

Incarnate God, as with joy we look on with Simeon and Anna,
we pray for the hope that all might see:
in you, nations can be restored;
in you, relationship can be reconciled;
in you, hate can be turned to love.

In the countries of the world
where this message needs to be heard:
stir your people to speak out.
Among the leaders of nations
where this message needs to inspire:
pour your Holy Spirt.

Silence

As this new year
gives a chance for new beginnings,
we pray for the endings:
those whom we have loved who have died;
those who are facing the end of a relationship;
those who are moving house, moving job, changing career.
In the partings, give strength.
In the sorrow, give comfort.
Encourage the fearful,
reassure the anxious:
give them peace.

Silence

Help your church to take the opportunities
to give voice to the new beginning in Jesus Christ,
where all hear you call us by name.
Let what you have given us to sow
spring up and bear fruit—to be another crown in your glory.
This we pray as we praise you,
incarnate God, who is with us today and always.
And so we pray the prayer, that Jesus taught us: **Our Father…**

Offertory Prayer

With your great gift before us,
your incarnate self, gracious God,
we offer these small gifts.
Show us how to us them
to honour your call
and proclaim the good news
not only that you are incarnate
but you are the Saviour of World. **Amen**

Blessing

So let us go continuing in our praise of God
ready to not just speak about a child in a manger
but about what that child grew to be and do —
be the Saviour of the World.
And may the blessing of God,
who is eternal, incarnate, and abiding,
go with you, this day and always. Amen