

**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS  
31/12/2023  
CAVES BEACH UNITING CHURCH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Glory be to you, O God; you have given us joy, at this festive season.

**Our praise rings out for Jesus, the source of Christmas joy.**

Glory be to you, O God; you have given us salvation at this holy time.

**Our thanksgiving is for your Chosen Child, who is our Saviour.**

Glory be to you, O God; you have given us hope at this wonder-filled time.

**Our prayers are offered in the name of Jesus, who is come to make your purpose clear.**

Glory be to you, O God of every age.

**We join with hosts of saints and angels; glory be to you, O loving and eternal God!**

**Opening Prayer**

O God, you were with your Chosen Child, Jesus, from the beginning;  
**from the day of our birth you have gone with us.**

O God, you were with Jesus as he grew strong and wise;  
**as we have grown and matured, you have been our guide.**

O God, you were with Jesus when he was tempted and called;  
**in our testing times and in our life choices, you have been there.**

O God, you were with Jesus at his life's end, at the cross and rising time;  
**we believe you will be with us as our time merges with your eternal time. Glory be to you, O God! Amen.**

**HYMN TIS 599** Take My Life and Let It Be  
<https://youtu.be/Gf11rReeWIs>

**PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

Praise Holy One, all Creation,  
Praise Holy One in heavens,  
on earth, in waters, on land,  
in skies, from mountain tops  
to ocean depths – praise Holy One!  
God created all that is,  
Holy One, our Source of Life.  
We give thanks, and we will sing  
our praises into another year!

**As we** stand at the close of another year, Holy One,

we pause for a moment and name with honesty:  
the disappointments *pause*  
the delights *pause*  
the gifts *pause*  
the griefs *pause*  
the losses *pause*  
the love *pause*  
our turning from you *pause*  
our turning toward you *pause*  
our faithful enacting of your way *pause*.  
We say a heartfelt *thank you*  
for all that has been good.  
We say sorry: we are sorry.  
Help us let go and enter new life.

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE`**

Friends, look back without regret.  
What you are sorry for  
is forgiven – you may let it go.  
and embark on a new year,  
enter new life with peace. Amen.

**HYMN: TIS 145** The King of Love My Shepherd Is  
<https://youtu.be/nWfZ-8s71-k>

### **BIBLE READINGS**

#### **Psalm 148**

- 1 Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!
- 2 Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!
- 4 Praise him, you highest heavens  
and you waters above the heavens!
- 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.
- 6 He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.
- 7 Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,
- 8 fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

9 Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
10 Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!  
11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
12 Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!  
13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.  
14 He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.  
Praise the LORD!

• **Luke 2:22–40**

22 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 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word,

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

## The Return to Nazareth

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him.

## **HYMN 135** All Things Bright and Beautiful

[https://youtu.be/y\\_bo9sBhALA](https://youtu.be/y_bo9sBhALA)

## **SERMON**

The Christmas story takes a big jump now as we jump to Jesus being dedicated in the Temple. In the past week we have all in some ways enjoyed the fruits of the celebration of Christ's birth. Time with family, time away from the hum drum of everyday life. Now we are on the cusp of celebrating yet another New Year.

There have been Boxing Day sales events. Rubbish bins full of Christmas wrapping and the SALE is in just about every shop window. Come next Tuesday many offices and businesses will come back to work.

The carols have disappeared from the air waves and the magnificent Christmas light displays in many gardens will start to disappear. What is left is a few more pounds around the waist for many of us and some even have a growing credit card debt.

After all the drama and celebration of that magnificent birth Mary and Joseph then had to come back into the difficulties of bringing their new child home and life would have been gradually getting back to normal. After choirs of angels and visiting Wise Men bearing gifts the daily life of a carpenter would have seemed very mundane. We are told elsewhere that they returned to Galilee and that the child grew and became strong. Things seemed to be normal.

It can also seem a bit like this sort of dichotomy for us as a Christian. Life is not always full of choirs of angels and visiting dignitaries. We also have to live in the everyday world like everyone else.

Later, at the Transfiguration, Jesus pointed out to His disciples that we can camp out on mountain top experiences every day. But our faith must also function, stay alive, during the ordinary days of our lives. Living an ordinary life and maintaining our spirituality should be a routine art of our journey as a Christian.

It is here that the Gospel reading this morning brings out the importance of a lifelong spirituality. How often in your life have you experienced some wonderful mountain top experiences only to be sucked back into apathy by the mundane routine of the everyday experiences of your life?

We cannot have the celebrations and excitement of Christmas, Easter, Christian Camps and crusades every day. While wonderful experiences like this can help us feel closely connected to God there needs to be a real dedication when we try to maintain our spiritual life beyond the exhilaration of these times.

It is a bit like me wanting to have a strong toned body even though I only go to the gym and exercise every three months. It can never happen. To build and maintain a strong spirituality we need to look to people in the Gospel like the man and woman featured in today's Gospel reading.

Let's start with Mary and Joseph. I would have thought that after all the dramatic experiences of God and angels and miracles that they'd had, they'd be pretty much ready to start their own new religion. There are always plenty of people out there ready to settle for a second rate faith by following people who've had especially dramatic experiences and are therefore deemed to be especially close to God.

But in fact, Joseph and Mary are not seeking to big note themselves and only eight days after the birth we read that they are following up the rituals of their faith and having the child circumcised – the first major act of dedicating their child to God.

And then, Luke tells us, in just forty days, we again see them complying with the time-honoured religious traditions of Israel and taking their young son up to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and making the customary sacrifices in thanksgiving for the child and for purification of the parents.

What we are witnessing in this passage is not some glorious religious event. It was a simple dedication ceremony called for in Jewish Law. It was a ritual observance which was simply a part of their lives as a family. Simple routine responses to God's love can have a powerful impact in our lives.

The Gospel passage goes on to introduce us to two people who have devoted their lives to the development of their spirituality. In their later years both had developed the gift to recognise the ways in which God moves through the lives of those who visited the Temple.

Simeon was a devout and righteous person who had for many years followed spiritual disciplines like regular prayer, knowledge of the Torah and reflective contemplation. When an ordinary couple came to the Temple to dedicate their first born Simeon immediately recognised the difference in this child. Luke records the prayer which Simeon said to that special child. Part of this prayer can be found in most Christian communities and is known as the Nunc

Dimittis: "Now Lord, let your servant rest in peace, for you have kept your promise. With my own eyes I have seen the salvation you prepared for all people."

Now we move on to join with Anna. Luke tells us that she is a daughter of Phanuel and was recognised as a prophet. The 84-year-old widow lived and worshipped in the temple. This would have included hours of prayer and devotional tasks which would have varied with the seasons of the Jewish calendar. Like Simeon she has developed the ability to recognise the gifts on those who daily passed through the Temple precincts. Once again this ordinary family drew her attention and she recognised the long sought after Saviour.

It is important to recognise that nothing spectacular happens in the passage other than two older people who had devoted themselves to spiritual gifts recognised and acknowledged Jesus long before His ministry begins. The family returned to an ordinary life in Nazareth where He continued to grow in wisdom and God's favour.

As we start to settle back into the routine of our lives this passage calls on us to persevere with our routine practice of building our spirituality through routine devotional times when we absorb the scriptures, pray, and reflect on where God is leading us. Our faith is more than just the spectacular times of Christmas and Easter. Taking time each day to nurture our faith is what Luke is challenging all of us to do.

**HYMN TIS 467** I am the Church, You are the Church  
<https://youtu.be/jvtu2YGcNho>

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

As a new year begins  
and as we continue to celebrate Jesus' birth,  
we pray for renewal in our world.  
May what we offer of money,  
time, and love encourage life -  
flourishing, thriving life for all. Amen.

**HYMN 650** Brother, Sister Let me Serve You  
<https://youtu.be/QO92Lw9v8PE>

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

We pray for Creation, Child of our Creator,  
as the years turn again.  
From stars and planets and galaxies

we hardly understand,  
to microbes and atoms  
beyond our comprehension.  
We trust to you what we do not know,  
what we see in part, with awe.  
We pray for Creation, Child of our Creator,  
as the years turn again.  
From mountain tops to ocean depths,  
from pole to ever thawing pole;  
from turbulent skies we cannot  
predict to the plates constantly moving  
beneath us – we trust you to hold  
our Earth, and pray we learn  
a lighter touch.  
We pray for Creation, Child of our Creator,  
as the years turn again.  
From elephants to whales,  
anchovies to ants,  
eagles and pigeons and wrens;  
from lions to gazelles,  
kookaburras to snakes,  
we marvel at the wonders,  
and trust your love for them all.

We pray for Creation, Child of our Creator,  
as the years turn again.  
From Australia to Scandinavia,  
China to America,  
Scotland to Argentina,  
Zimbabwe to Pakistan;  
from kings and queens,  
presidents and prime ministers,  
to teachers, cleaners, secretaries,  
nannies, stay-at-home parents;  
and descendants from many  
cultures and countries,  
we trust ourselves beloved, Holy One,  
each and every one,  
and we will live with honour  
for the dignity of each other,  
as we live into the richness  
of our wholeness together.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and forever. **Amen**

**HYMN 687** God Gives Us a Future  
<https://youtu.be/64IXkcwZ06M>

### **BENEDICTION**

You are children of God;  
remember, you are beloved!  
As you enter the New Year,  
may the Spirit cry with your heart,  
Christ birth new life within you,  
and the Creator draw you into wholeness. Amen