

CHRISTMAS 2

2/1/22

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome to 2022.

A time to start a new phase in our life.

Welcome to 2022.

A chance to build on all the light coming from the Nativity!

Welcome to 2022.

We all have a part to play in the 'new normal.'

OPENING PRAYER

God of the past, God of the present, God of the years to come, we worship you!

Creator, time-maker, sustainer, source of eternal hope, we offer praise and thanksgiving to you.

God of the newborn, God of the exploring youngster, God of the maturing adult, we worship you!

Challenger, enabler, fount of wisdom, we look to you, and learn from you.

God of the planner, God of the artist, God of the caregiver, we worship you!

Source of beauty, Spirit of Compassion, friend of the oppressed, we take your Word to heart.

God known in Jesus, Inspiration of the prophets, Soul keeper of the saints, we worship you!

Holy One, focus of justice, destroyer of evil, Light in the dark places, we are ready to be activists for good.

AMEN

HYMN 301 The first nowell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH7PshxnLil>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND CONFESSION

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
for you have freely bestowed your glorious grace on us.

In the beginning you brought all thing into being
through the Word who was with you,
and destined us for adoption as your children,
making known the mysteries of your will,
through the law and prophets.

In Jesus, your Word became flesh among us,
that the fullness of your grace and truth
might enlighten the world.
Though he came to what was his own,
his own people did not accept him,
but crucified him.
You redeemed him from the strong hands of death,
and turned our grieving into joy.
So now, as those you have marked with your Holy Spirit,
we live for the praise of your glory,
our lives like a well nourished garden
and our hearts radiant over your good gifts.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

It can be hard to stay attuned to the light,
things cloud our view and divert our gaze.

When we behave poorly,
when we are mistaken or react badly,
when we switch off,

Open our hearts to your light and grace.

When we privilege ourselves above others,
buttonhole our neighbour,
and promote falsehoods and division,

Open our hearts to your light and grace.

When we live unsustainably
overreaching as to what our needs are
and under performing in caring for the earth,

Open our hearts to your light and grace.

When we are weary and downhearted,
Struggling with the cost of faithful living
and have lost our way,

Open our hearts to your light and grace.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Beloved children of God, hear these words of assurance:

God's light shines and will not be extinguished, nothing will overcome the love we are gifted and the grace that extended to us.

READING #1

- **John 1:1-9**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 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. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world

REFLECTION

READING #2

- **John 1: 10-18**

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 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. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

HYMN 314 As with gladness men of old

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB8rKNrIpDQ>

SERMON

It seems appropriate to me that we start this new calendar year with the imposing beginning to John's Gospel.

The word 'flesh' has many negative connotations within some parts of Christian culture. We say things like: 'the sins of the flesh,' and 'what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit.' For a long time the idea has prevailed that there was some sinful connotations around the human body and we have traditionally tended to stay away from any connection with the sins of the flesh.

At the same time there is another approach within Christianity which picks up on the approach that we have from the start of John's Gospel today: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." This Word who was with God in the beginning; the Word who is God; this Word which became flesh. This real human flesh and blood came among us and remains living in us today.

At Christmas, with all the magic surrounding the celebrations, it is very easy to idealise and romanticise about babies. We can visualise babies and carry on about their innocence and the wonderful bond between a mother and her child. Babies can all seem so cute and unblemished. Here the concept of the flesh is all love and happiness.

But parents do know a bit better. Babies seem to spend so much time burping, dribbling, poohing, screaming and vomiting, always at the most inconvenient times. I feel for mums who have barely slept, whose nipples feel on fire and at 2am the baby has just thrown up on them and the chair they were relaxing in. Happiness might not be the emotion which comes to mind here.

However, in another way, that mother's reactions might just mirror the right reaction we need to fully comprehend the amazing news of the Nativity. That is the reaction to something completely unexpected! The Word who was in the beginning, became flesh and lived among us.

A psychologist who has done a lot of work with children has tried to look at the world from the child's perspective and that experience can be humiliating sometimes for the child he tells us. As an infant you are at the bottom of the pecking order. The infant is constantly surrounded by much bigger people who know more than the child and have a lot more power. A child just can't avoid all of this because they rely on those around them for food, shelter, clothing and love.

Have you come across those children who seem to constantly want to correct the adults in their company? This psychologist sees this as the child wanting to be as powerful and knowledgeable as the surrounding adults.

By again looking at the world in through the eyes of a child it might help us to connect with the wonder of Christmas. We have, the Word become flesh; the Word that was there at the beginning; the Word that is God. This Word was an infant, frustratingly powerless, humiliatingly ignorant, absolutely dependent with this big and powerful and sometimes frightening world surrounding Him.

God became one of us and as a child struggled with His limitations in human form. This human went through infancy, childhood and pre-teen, all the while experiencing the world through the eyes of a growing child.

If we take this seriously then we need to be careful not to get drawn into versions of Christian spirituality which holds the beauty of the human body which God created as being something to be treated with contempt and

consequently seeking to have our spiritual journey look to some sort of out-of-body spiritual nirvana.

The God we worship did become flesh. As we heard in the reading this morning no one has seen God other than in the form of Jesus, His Son. This then draws us to look at things from the perspective of spirit becoming flesh, not about liberating the spirit from the flesh. Everything in our faith then needs to be lived out in the here and now and fully in the flesh.

This revelation that God became flesh means that we have to carefully evaluate our pre-conceived images of God. So many thoughts just slip off our tongue without us realising how off track it could be.

We are finite whereas God is infinite.

We have our limitation whereas God is all-powerful.

We can change and adapt while God is unchanging.

For all of our learning and science we know so little but God is all-knowing.

These statements are not the point to start looking at how Christians understand God. Like John we start with the simple statement that God became flesh in Jesus.

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a Father's only Son... It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made Him known.

Our image of God arises out of that human life created in Jesus. It was a life lived with the same ups and down that we all experience. This means that when we talk about the power of God we don't see a power that can change the world with the click of His fingers so that hostility and violence evaporate. What we do see is a love that perseveres through suffering and violence and hostility.

We don't see a magician who can absorb evil and suffering but what we do have is the source of hope and salvation for everyone who is straining under the weight of the sins of the world.

I could go on and on and address all of those concepts of God's differences from us but I think that you know where I am going. It is through Jesus with all of His human limitations that we came to fully know God. It is from this point that we must start to see God through Jesus.

Another revelation coming out of the Nativity is that the full truth becomes clearer when we hold on to two fundamentals.

- Firstly God has honoured the human form by becoming fully human and understands what it is to be human.
- Secondly we can only fully know about God because God was revealed to us in the flesh.

This then sets out what we are and what God is.

We need to reflect on the Christmas passages in the context of the God made flesh in the Nativity. The earliest Christians recorded these stories of Jesus' birth and infancy and this influences how we see the world around us today. We can see a world where there is deprivation and oppression but this is fully connected to God through the baby born in a stable in Bethlehem.

I am sure that we all have received more than a few Christmas cards, even this year. Some will have nativity scenes and wish your family 'a happy new year' and other wording matching the sentiments of the season.

Did any of you receive a message like: "as we remember God becoming what you are, may you become more of what God is?"

This might be a shocking card to receive but it is the most important detail that you need to carry into the New Year. God became one with us to enable us to become one with God. In Jesus we have seen what God is like and we have the opportunity to become one with God. In Jesus we have seen the destiny for which humanity came into being. The end of this process is a human life lived to the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

The Gospels draw us into the reconciliation of heaven and earth and spirit and flesh.

John speaks to us of becoming children of God but not through conception, gestation and labour. We are born again from God through the Spirit, we are then part of God's family. The reading today from John is in fact the ultimate good news.

There is a simple but profound promise for us here. The destiny for which we were created has the truth which sets us free. God became a child of humanity so that we all can become a child in God's family.

This does not carry with it a Disney like perfect vision in our future. We need to remember that Jesus was hunted even as a baby and humiliated when he died. This is the reality, God knows our pain and our struggles and all of the anxiety which goes with it.

In our lives we can seek to connect with the promised destiny by following Jesus' footsteps knowing that God is travelling the journey with us so that as members of His family we have grace and hope and love.

HYMN 675 Lord the light of you love is shining

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rce9UHYZwl4>
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PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of all, may these gifts bring light to those receive them that they may know they are gathered into our circle of love and care. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of all time,

we pray for the year that was. We let go of things that have caused us pain, we grieve the things we have lost and remember with gladness the things that brought us joy. As we leave the past and set our sights what is yet to come:

Let us be as good as your word, offering grace upon grace to those you place in our path.

We pray for the year ahead, for the good things it will bring and the troubles it will bring, for the new experiences that will come our way. In all the circumstances that face us:

Let us be as good as your word, offering grace upon grace to those you place in our path.

We pray for innovations that will arise, for advances in thinking and technology that will serve the earth and her people, that will steer us away from ruin and onto pathways of repair and restoration.

Let us be as good as your word, offering grace upon grace to those you place in our path.

We pray that we continue to see beauty, to hold onto hope, to delight in what is good, and be people of compassion and joy.

Let us be as good as your word, offering grace upon grace to those you place in our path.

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 for ever. Amen.

HYMN 523 Here, Lord, we take the broken bread

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAoHMT4NKOI>

COMMUNION

Hear the words of institution of this sacrament as recorded by the apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: "This is my body which is for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, for the remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

With this bread and this cup we do as our Saviour commands: we set them apart for the holy supper to which he calls us, and we come to God with our prayers of thanksgiving.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right that we should always offer thanks, O God,
because you have created and sustained us
and all things.

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place,
joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We praise you, O God,
that in your mercy you gave your only Son, Jesus Christ,
that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life.

We give thanks for his humble birth,
for his life of ministry and love,
for his sufferings and death on the cross,
for his glorious resurrection and ascension,
and for the promise that he will come again.

O God, by your word and Spirit
bless and sanctify this bread and this wine,
that they may be for us
the communion of the body and blood of Christ,
and that he may ever live in us
and we in him.

God, accept us,
as we offer and present ourselves, our souls and our bodies,
to be a holy and a living sacrifice;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit
be all honour and glory, now and forever.

AMEN

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Receive this holy sacrament
of the body and blood of Christ,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

DISTRIBUTION

AFTER COMMUNION

Let us pray:

We thank you, God our Father,
that through word and sacrament
you have given us your Son
who is the true bread of heaven
and food of eternal life.

So strengthen us in your service
that our daily living may show our thanks;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

HYMN 454 Worship the Lord

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytBTMr0K_I

BENEDICTION

We are the children of God, created by love and the recipients of grace upon grace.

Hold on to this as you go from here.

AMEN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SALobHk1j8k>