

CHRISTMAS 1

26/12/21

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

The joy of a carver with a new block of wood.

The excitement of a reader with a new book.

The response of a musician to a new tune.

The love of a mother for a new baby.

The sense of adventure in a new path taken.

For all our new starts, we give God thanks.

Let us worship God!

Opening Prayer

This is the time for new beginnings.

This is the time for reflection.

This is the time for taking stock.

This is the time for setting faithful New Year goals.

This is the time for putting old grudges and resentments to rest.

This is the time for seeking new friends and fresh avenues of Christian service.

This is the time for renewing our faith: renewed in Jesus Christ.

**This is the time to rejoice in Christ's presence amongst us.
Amen.**

HYMN 268 Joy to the world

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZhqpb97y7Q>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of peace on earth and good will to all, today and all days we give you our thanks.

You are born among us today and every day.

This Christmas and every Christmas we are the receivers of a great gift; you are present with us, you present us with all the world.

In the sun and the moon, in the stars and the galaxies, your eternal power is in full view.

In the life of Jesus, in the life of every creature, your eternal love is in full view.

With the shepherds, with the angles, with magi, with the holy family, we praise you and speak out our thanks.

God of love, we have celebrated again the Christmas story.

Some of us have done so with family and friends, some in community and some alone.

But all of us have been blessed with your presence this Christmas as we have been in every Christmas, and every day of our lives.

Forgive us if are just going through the motions.

Forgive us if we have not been stunned and surprised by your presence with us.

Forgive us if we have treated the Christmas story as something normal and unremarkable.

Forgive us if we do not live in joyful and humble gratitude and delight.

May we, in this quite time after Christmas Day, let the joy of your presence sweep into our bones.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

It makes no difference if we are ready.

It makes no difference if we understand.

It makes no difference, if we are waiting in anticipation or not

– the new life of God has dawned on us.

The new life of God is growing in us.

We are forgiven!

READINGS

- **1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26**

¹⁸ Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod.

¹⁹ His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰ Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord”; and then they would return to their home.

²⁶ Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people.

- **Luke 2:41-52**

41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44 Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day’s journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents[a] saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” 49 He said to them, “Why were you

searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"
50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

HYMN 313 Good Christians all, rejoice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RowlQil0jTU>

SERMON

Well here we are just one day after Christmas. A lot of Christmas trees will already be headed for the recycling.

If you stop to listen you might realise that the perennial commercial Christmas music has disappeared too. Consequently we are now freed up to get a lot more of the Word of God than is possible during the mad Christmas rush. We can now take time to simply reflect on the scriptures surrounding the birth of Christ.

The summer solstice festival known by many as Christmas has now passed. The church's Festival of the Nativity, also known as Christmas, is well and truly over.

The festival of Epiphany runs now for about 10 days. Today I am interested in Luke's view of Jesus early life. The earliest Gospel account that we have comes from Mark. He starts the story of Jesus' life once He has turned about 30. There is no mention in Mark's Gospel of Jesus birth and infancy. Mark starts Jesus' ministry with Him being baptised by John the Baptist.

In other early Christian works from people like St Paul there was no attempt to include a narrative of Christ's early life. Along with this we can look at the Gospel of St John which was probably the last Gospel to be committed to writing. Once again there is no birth narrative.

This leaves us with Matthew and Luke being the only Gospel writers to refer to the Nativity. Luke extends his narrative to the young man entering the Temple in Jerusalem. Now why did Luke latch on to this story?

A young man not yet fully mature caught up in discussions in the temple during the family's pilgrimage.

I want to suggest that the importance reflects some issues which arose later in the community for whom Luke was recording things. It is also a very common pastoral problem which still comes up in communities today. I am sure that not a few clergy would love to have a dollar for every time they have heard the statement: 'Gee I'm hopeless. I get so mad at myself and I do try really hard but I don't seem to become the person that I really want to be. I hate it and I have become so discouraged and now I feel like giving up. I can't forgive myself.' These clergy/pastors might be able to retire early on the bonus if they had that dollar for every encounter like this!

Then most wise clergy and pastors say look back a year or two and then you might understand how far you have in fact come. You have done well! And again sometimes you are still down on yourself because all that you can see in front of you is a seemingly endless space and you refuse to look back to acknowledge how far you have in fact come on your journey through life. I am sure that there are a number of people here today who would relate to this!

So! What has all of this got to do with the readings today? Well in the story of the twelve-year old Jesus which probably was and can still be seen as controversial today. This controversy can also help us understand why other early writers avoided the subject.

The idea that God could become human in the form of a baby boy was in many ways scandalous but the image of a little snotty nosed boy then growing into a bratty little boy was too much for some of the early fathers of the church to deal with. If God came as a baby then there was a whole lot of growing up that this child would have to go through as he matured. Could He possibly develop and mature just as we do?

Then there is the theological issue around what we in fact mean when we say that Jesus was flawless, sinless and perfect. Any child growing up would learn much from his mistakes.

Today's reading addresses this issue directly when we hear: "Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and people." Remember in the Old Testament reading today we heard similar words used about Samuel when he was a young boy serving in the Temple.

So, we can safely assume that Jesus, like Samuel didn't arrive perfectly formed and without need of growing and developing as young people just like any other child. Jesus would have had to walk before he could run. So it is no wonder when clergy and pastors sit with people that we ask why are you beating yourself up so harshly for not being able to run before you walk.

Yes we are called to model ourselves on Jesus. This does not in any way mean aiming for the completely unattainable and the falling into despair when this doesn't happen. Rather than modelling ourselves on Jesus we are in fact being invited to follow His course in life – from a baby weak and helpless – and then on the road to maturity and strength.

This journey is bound to have a lot of ups and downs, there will be obstacles, and times to catch up. Sometimes we have a chance to sit by the road and catch our breath as we wonder if we can still go on and at other times we might need to pick up our speed a bit. After all Jesus slumped by the side of the road three times and he walked to Golgotha. Times when we feel frustration, exhaustion and fear do not mean that we have taken the wrong turn.

Resurrection might only be three days away.

There is another thing which relates to these readings. When people are wanting to beat themselves up for still not having arrived at the 'Destination Perfection' you may be in fact diminishing the massive advances that you have made. There can be comments like: "It might look like I've improved a bit," you say, "but I'm only putting it on. I might be treating them okay on the surface, but inside I still want to punch their lights out."

Using such language does not mean that you are beyond hope of redemption, just having a bit of a struggle along the way. In this respect we can take note of Paul's advice to the Colossians when he says: "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."

We can clothe ourselves with love which leads to harmony. That is how we start to make those vital changes. If we have watched children grow up then we recognise that one day they will be 'dressing up' in adult clothes. Trying the 'adult' clothes is a stage in their growth. At one time the 'make believe' of children becomes a part of the actual part of growing into adults.

Trying out new things is a vital way of keeping on developing as a fully loving follower of Christ as you journey through your faith development.

Christmas is the time to acknowledge that deep in our bones we all still have a lot of growing to do. It is a life-long journey but the journey is taken as one of God's chosen ones. You are each holy and beloved.

As long as we keep looking to Jesus on a daily basis we are faithfully following him and will gradually grow into a deeper and deeper faith, just as

that 12 year old child did in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is part of the miracle of Christmas.

HYMN 318 Away in a manger

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnwO_0DrpCk

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God, the Psalmist sings out praise after praise.

The whole earth sings out praise continually and joyfully.

We join that chorus today with our lives, with our time,

with our resources and with our thanks for your generous love.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Good morning everyone,

The Voice of God at Sunset. From the songbook: Psalm 50:1-6.

Who has not marvelled at the beauty of a sunset? We stand motionless, awestruck, hushed by the flaming sky, as the sun moves over the western horizon. Seeming to hesitate a moment, the glowing orb suddenly drops out of sight, leaving the sky ablaze with brilliant shades of pink, orange, and red. Somehow the frustrations of the day are put to silence by the majestic, yet soothing voice of God as we view the glorious sunset.

When the conditions are just right, the last diminishing bit of yellow - orange sun suddenly changes into a brilliant emerald green. This green flash puts an exciting exclamation point to the end of the day.

To Christians, every sunset is an exclamation point to us by God the Creator to the end the day. It's as if the Lord were saying, "Set aside your worries. Rest from your labour's. Forget about those disappointments. I am still here, taking care of My universe. I am in control. I have not changed. Look up beyond the sun to Me and be at peace. Allow the beauty of every sunsets appearance to be a reminder of God's enduring presence in your life.

Father in heaven thank you for your beautiful creation of a daily sunset and sunrise. Lord, thank you for being our lamp which lights our paths of life. Which guides us in the right direction so we don't veer off in the wrong way.

Lord, thank for keeping us all safe and being our shield between us and the global virus for the last 2 years. Lord, please continue to do so as we are moving into a brand new year with the virus still in place. Lord, help us all not to panic but accept that we need to live with the virus. And Lord, please give wisdom and guidance to all our world, national, state and local leaders. That they lead us in a just and compassionate way. That the sooner we work together united, the sooner we will be rid of the virus globally.

We pray that everyone who are suffering from or have been affected by the virus, severe storms, tornados, floods and devastating bush fires. Losses of loved ones, homes, livelihoods and jobs. Illnesses, homelessness, addictions, domestic violence, abuse and persecution. Lord, help them see through all the trauma they are or have experienced. That there is a light at the end of the tunnel and know that light is you. And that they know that you will give them strength, comfort and will provide for them, in everything they will need. So they can recover and move on in life with you in their hearts. Lord, help them give all their cares and burdens to you dear God as your burdens are light and your yolk is easy. We know there is hope and that hope comes from you and is in you!

We pray for all our congregational brothers and sisters in Christ, whom are waiting for or are recovering from surgeries. Lord, we lift them all up into your loving arms for healing so they know and feel comfort from your great unfailing love, which endures forever and never lets us down. In His precious name of Your beloved Son, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Thank you, "O" Christ, for this feast of life, we are fed by Your love, we are strengthened by Your life. We are sent forth into this world to live, Your way, and share Your joy. You are the vine, and we are Your branches.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Please join me in the Lord's prayer:

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 322 The north wind

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJCYk5v3J24>

BENEDICTION

Above all, clothe yourselves with love.
Know yourselves clothed in love.
It is love that binds everything together
in perfect harmony.
And let the peace of Christ live in your hearts,
and be thankful.
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.
In the name of Christ.

Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74