

Dorset South and West Methodist Circuit Written Service
3rd January 2021 prepared by Tony Boyden, Local Preacher.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Light of life, you came in flesh,
born into human pain and joy,
and gave us power to be your children.
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness
and walk in the way of peace. Amen

HYMN: StF 176/MP 420 Like a candle flame

1. Like a candle flame,
flickering small in our darkness,
Uncreated light shines through
infant eyes

Chorus:

God is with us, alleluia.
God is with us, alleluia.
Come to save us, alleluia.
Come to save us, alleluia.
Alleluia!

2. Stars and angels sing,
yet the earth sleeps in shadows;
can this tiny spark
set a world on fire?

Chorus:

3. Yet his light shall shine
from our lives, Spirit blazing,
as we touch the flame
of his holy fire.

Chorus:

Graham Kendrick (b 1950)

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Glory to you, O God, for bringing light into the darkness and life out of nothingness.

We wonder at the mystery of life,
white-hot suns and whirling planets, the vastness of space and far-flung stars.
We wonder at the mystery of our little earth, its dark and fertile soils and deep and fruitful
waters, its changing seasons of unfolding colour and light.
We wonder at the mystery of the creatures, at our interdependence with all living things,
We wonder at your abundance, your overflowing generosity in giving life.
Glory to you, O God

Yet still we forget.

We take for granted what is gifted for all people and grab for more.
We do not value one another, or listen to those hurting and rejected,
We forget your light at the heart of all things, and neglect to find you in each other or our
world. We are sorry.

Glory to you, O God, for you saw we were lost and heard our angst
You came amongst us forgiving and loving.
You dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth, to be our way.
We have come to know your life and light.
Awaken us again to your presence this day. Amen

READING: John 1 (1-9) 10-18

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 in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 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. (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.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 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

REFLECTIONS

Eric Idle, the former Monty Python member, wrote a very funny and clever 'Galaxy Song' in which he managed to summarise the mind-boggling details of the universe. Those dimensions are so enormous as to be beyond human comprehension. Billions of stars in our own galaxy, the Milky Way, for instance, all with at least one planet orbiting them; and possibly hundreds of galaxies. And we know God created all this right down to the smallest microscopic particles known to humankind.

And yet here was a God who took on flesh and became one of us. Sometimes it's hard to comprehend all this. But Jesus was a flesh and blood person, born to a particular woman in a particular town at a particular time and who died the most painful death imaginable. (In Graham Kendrick's words: "*Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered*")

A former Bishop of Winchester, John V Taylor remarked: "*The crucified Jesus is the only accurate picture of God the world has ever seen.*"

And that puts today's passage from John into a somewhat different context. The Gospel says clearly that Christ was fully identified with God in the creation of all things: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*" You couldn't make it plainer. Christ was an inseparable part of God's activity in creation and he was one with God. But then comes a possible problem; that is if we only identify Christ by looking back to his part in the original creation.

Many of us will remember that some years ago Stephen Fry caused a national stir by doubting the God existed or rather if he did exist, that he amounted to "an evil, capricious, monstrous maniac". For instance, who else, he said would inflict terminal cancer on the life of a small innocent child. And that's been a common criticism of our faith. If God is the almighty creator of the universe, why does he allow such cruel suffering? Either God is doing a bad job or he is a bad God.

There are no clever arguments to explain away such suffering. We can only grieve with all who suffer, and we must do what we can to help. But this is where should heed Taylor's words

in particular, *“The crucified Jesus is the only accurate picture of God the world has ever seen.”* For when you cry out ‘how could God allow all this suffering?’, you are looking not at a God pulling the strings like a puppeteer but a God hanging on a cross. And it’s a very different question why this should happen to God.

John’s magnificent prologue recognises that there is something wrong with the world: for in Jesus, God stepped down into a dark and sinful world who *“knew him not”*. His very creation, his *“own people”* did not accept him. Hardly commensurate with someone pulling the strings to get his own way in what he created. Rather he is someone unwilling to give up on that creation, to show an infinite love which led to the ultimate agonies of the Cross. Of course we know that this in reality was not a defeat but rather led to the Resurrection and the doorway into a new life for humankind.

So Christ was involved in creation, yes, but in the person of Jesus he was also striving for humankind to be reconciled with God. (*“In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself.”* Colossians 1. 19-20) It was a relationship of self-giving as never before seen; one not about power, but about love.

God is not the malevolent puppet-master of Fry’s imagination. He doesn’t want us to dance because he’s pulling our strings but to freely dance with our hearts full of love for him. That’s why he entered our creation as Jesus; to suffer and love alongside us. That’s why we gain a truly accurate picture of God as the crucified Jesus; the one making the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. Just as the Son was involved in that initial act of creation so it was the Son who brought God into the world he created in an act of indescribable love and reconciliation.

John speaks with bitter irony of a world in which God went unrecognised by his own creation. Sometimes like panicky lost children we do lose focus and the Light of the World becomes a blur to our eyes. Even when we do concentrate, our judgement probably lacks the kind of rational detachment Stephen Fry might seek. And this is because as followers of Christ our thoughts are given an extra vital dimension. At the foot of the Cross our hearts are touched as well as our minds.

In the words of the final verse of a lovely carol by Jaroslav Vajda :

*The love that we have always known, our constant joy and endless light,
Now to the loveless world be shown; now break upon its deathly night.
Into one song compress the love that rules our universe above:
Sing love, sing love, sing God is love! Amen.*

HYMN: StF272/MP162 From heaven you came, helpless babe

1, From heaven you came, helpless
babe, entered our world , your glory
veiled, not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.

Chorus: This is our God, the Servant
King, he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering,
of worship to the Servant King

2. There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
‘Yet not my will but yours’ he said.

Chorus:

3. Come see his hands and his feet, the
scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.

Chorus:

4. So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other’s needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we’re serving.

Chorus

Graham Kendrick (b.1950)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Loving God, we come to you as our refuge and our strength.

We look to you after a difficult year for so many people in so many ways: where families have been hit by illness and death or redundancy and poverty; and individuals have experienced an aching loneliness through separation from loved ones and isolation.

And we remember that we are part of a global community where the problems are often made much worse in nations where there is already endemic poverty, famine and disease.

Bring those who have lost a sense of hope and optimism a feeling of peace and joy in this new year. So when we walk in the grey gloom of confusion, when pain drains all the colour out of our lives, when we are paralysed by fear of what the future might bring, reassure us by shining in the darkness, light of our lives. Remind us that you can bring change and hope out of the most difficult situations. And give us the courage to be a light for others we know are walking in the darkness. Amen

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 forever. Amen

HYMN: SF222 Who would think that what was needed

1. Who would think that what was needed to transform and save the earth might not be a plan or army, proud in purpose, proved in worth? Who would think, despite derision, that a child might lead the way? God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.

2. Shepherds watch and wise men wonder, monarchs scorn and angels sing; such a place as none would reckon hosts a holy helpless thing. Stable beasts and by-passed strangers watch a baby laid in the hay: God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.

3. Centuries of skill and science span the past from which we move, yet experience questions whether, with such progress, we improve. While the human lot we ponder, lest our hopes and humour fray, God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day

John Bell (b 1949) and
Graham Maule (b 1958)

BLESSING

Lord, you have called us and brought light into our lives.

May we let your light shine through us in our words and all that we do. Amen

