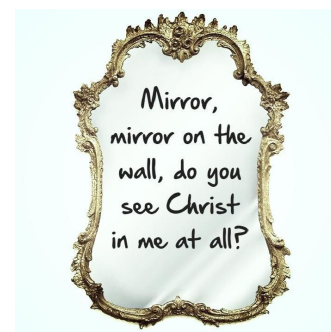


## Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.

'Mirror, mirror on the wall .....'

Sunday 12th January 2025

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



### Call to Worship. Psalm 29:2

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;  
worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness.

### STF 88

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of  
creation!

O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and  
salvation!

All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,  
praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and  
defend thee;

surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend  
thee:

ponder anew what the Almighty can do,  
who with his love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and  
restore thee,  
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before  
thee,  
then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,  
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is  
abounding,  
who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue  
confounding,  
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,  
saints with his mercy surrounding.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!  
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises  
before him!

Let the amen sound from his people again:  
gladly for aye we adore him.

### Prayers of adoration and confession :

Two prayers from great Christian leaders of the past.

Accept, O Father,

the sacrifice of all our thanksgivings: of praise, for your great mercies already received; of prayers, that they may continue and increase; of penitence, for the sins we have committed; and the love of our hearts, being the only gift that you seek or desire; and this we ask through the merits of your Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**Amen**      *John Donne, Poet and Church of England Priest 1572-1631*

Let us worship the Christ who draws near to each of us. Let us praise the Christ who loves the worst among us. Let us bless the Christ who shares with the least among us. Let us glorify the Christ who intercedes for all among us in the presence of God the Father. **Amen.**      *Ann Griffiths, Welsh hymn writer (1776-1805)*

### Bible reading. Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

### Reflection

Do you know which fairy tale the title of this service is from? "Mirror, mirror on the wall..."

When you think about it that wicked old witch was exceedingly vain! I guess fairy tales like Snow White are character building. Teaching us to be kind and to think of others and definitely not to think about ourselves as better than others. Sometimes though we go too far the other way and we don't see ourselves as having any worth or value.

Thinking about mirrors, I remember how in one church I worked with, we decided to make particular give away items for our church fair. We had type written notes, long before the computer age! We stuck these on the back of small mirrors. The notes were encouraging texts like John 3:16 'For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son'. Please turn over to see who he did that for.

Now I wonder how you would feel if you had part of today's gospel reading fixed onto a similar mirror? The words that say, "You are my Son(or child), whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Do you find yourself saying "that's not about me" ? God well pleased with who? Me!

Those are the words God the Father said to Jesus, His son. However the scriptures tell us we are all God's children who he loves and with whom he is ....well pleased.

Do you still find that difficult to accept? We are in good company, John the Baptist had such a low opinion of himself that he didn't even feel worthy enough to untie the straps of Jesus' sandals. I think today you would have to be in a very special relationship to let someone untie the straps of your sandals. However in John's time one of the duties of a slave was to untie the sandals of the master's feet. In Judaism, the act of untying one's sandal was such a degrading act that a Hebrew slave was not to undertake it. John says that Christ is so great that he, John, is not worthy to perform the degrading act of undoing his sandal straps. Let's not forget that Jesus would later say of John, that John was the greatest person born of woman. For now, we hear John say that he is so inferior to Jesus Christ that he is not worthy to perform the most menial, degrading task for his master.

Quite the reverse view of the people waiting expectantly for John to baptise them? They had a very high opinion of John, thinking he might even be the messiah. He soon corrected that idea.

One can understand the people's desire for a Saviour. The nation of Israel had a heightened expectation of the arrival of the Messiah at this time. About 190 years earlier, the Jews had regained some independence from the Grecian powers. The Jews gained control of their temple, cleansed it, and dedicated it to the Lord. Then the Romans exerted control over Judea and over the nation of Israel. The Jews were looking for a Messiah who was going to overthrow the Romans and initiate the age to come in Jerusalem.

It has been more than four hundred years since there has been a prophet of God. It has been more than four hundred years since the people of Israel had received a message from God. Now here is a person who is preaching the words of God, declaring judgment upon the people, and salvation to those who live a life turned to God. They were, one could say, living in impossible times and conditions. Under Roman occupation. Luke sets the historical framework for us, listing the political and religious leaders.

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, Luke 1:1-2a

Luke gave more than a chronological measure; he also told us something of the tenor of the times. So a little bit more of the history, but not too intense!

Tiberius was an emperor known for his cruelty and severity. Pontius Pilate was also renowned for his brutal massacres of the Jewish people in Judea, and his insensitivity towards the Jews. The rulers from the family of Herod the Great (Herod, Philip, and Lysanias) were known for their corruption and cruelty.

With all this, Luke reminds both his original readers and us today of the corruption and moral degradation of the Roman Empire, especially in the distant provinces like Judea.

Luke also listed the religious leaders of Judea in the period of Jesus' ministry. Caiaphas was actually the High Priest, but his father-in-law Annas (the patriarch of the family) was the real influence among the priestly class. The mention of these two corrupt high priests reminds us that the Jewish leaders were more interested in power politics than in serving God.

So when we look at the reflection of the times people were living in, it's no wonder that they earnestly sought out a Saviour.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if in today's world with all its problems and crises if people would turn to look for Christ.

The message John preaches to these eager souls is a bit disturbing to say the least. No gentle Jesus meek and mild! No comforting words but instead words to shake them into reality.

After declaring his own unworthy state, John says to the people, "His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Now just imagine someone coming into church struggling with the crises that are of our age and the preacher responded to them with similar words? Do you think we might see them again?

However, I guess we overlook the first few words, that he will gather people into his 'barn'. Instead we focus on the horror of "he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." We all too quickly and too often focus on the negative asking ourselves. "Are we going to be good enough for the barn?" Or do we tremble thinking that we might be going to the other place? Are we going to be good enough to please our Heavenly Father?

I remember someone explaining how things might be when we meet our 'maker'. The preacher had a mock up of the book of our lives that would be opened up as we arrived at the pearly gates! It was so huge he could hardly hold it. He said written on every page are the faults and failures of his life. Each of us could have a similar life storybook. The tremble factor was rippling through us as he slowly and dramatically began to turn the pages. Mind you as it was his life story he said he was holding, we were a bit intrigued to see what might be written! However as he slowly and methodically turned page after page and eventually whisked through chapter after chapter till he arrived at the end. Every single page, every single page! was blank! The last page on the rear cover said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

God wipes away every single sin and forgives us so completely that the pages are made blank and fresh. A clean fresh sheet to write our lives upon.

One task I enjoy when doing the housework is cleaning a mirror. If I have left the dust to accumulate and the image is marred. A bit of 'Mr Sheen' and the mirror gleams and I can't help but smile at the reflection coming back to me. I wonder if this was what was happening in a symbolic way at the river bank? They are being made to look at what could be. The reflection comes clear as they enter the river and are baptised. Signifying that they wanted to change their whole way of living. Washed clean and renewed.

The narrative then adds another surprise! Can you imagine yourself at the river bank and looking around the crowd to see who is going to be reformed? Oh! There's that cheating tax collector, things might just get a bit more reasonable with the revenue he collects? Oh and there's so and so and...? Who is that? No surely not. He's the one everyone is talking about, the Nazarene! He lives a blameless life and he does wonders for everyone who comes to him. Surely he doesn't need to be baptised?

Jesus also was baptised. Jesus did not receive baptism because he was a sinner that needed to repent and be cleansed from His sins. He did it to completely identify Himself with sinful humanity. This was the same heart that would lead to his ultimate identification with sinful Humanity on the cross.

His Heavenly Father's response. 'And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Note Jesus' response to the act of baptism...as he was praying. No party or celebration as often follows our baptismal acts. But prayer. It makes you think and really understand a little bit about the selfless life of Jesus Christ and no wonder his Heavenly Father is well pleased.

I wonder what reflection Jesus saw in the water as he was baptised that drew him immediately to pray?

Perhaps the crowds faces and the anxious and expectant looks on their faces. Reflecting the difficulties that they carried?

So Mirror, mirror on the wall...who are the people we need to see and to pray for if nothing else? Not because we want to feel good about ourselves, but we see ourselves so loved by our Heavenly Father that we can do nothing other than to reflect that love to others through our actions and prayers.

## STF 182

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
announces that the Lord is nigh;  
awake and hearken, for he brings  
glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin;  
make straight the way for God within,  
and let us all our hearts prepare  
for Christ to come and enter there.

For you are our salvation, Lord,  
our refuge, and our great reward;  
without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out your hand,  
and bid the fallen sinner stand;  
shine forth, and let your light restore  
earth's own true loveliness once more.

To God the Son all glory be  
whose advent sets his people free,  
whom, with the Father, we adore,  
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

## Prayers of Intercession

O God, we pray for all those in our world who are suffering from injustice: For those who are discriminated against because of their race, colour or religion; For those imprisoned for working for the relief of oppression; For those who are hounded for speaking the inconvenient truth; For those tempted to violence as a cry against overwhelming hardship; For those deprived of reasonable health and education; For those suffering from hunger and famine; For those too weak to help themselves and who have no one else to help them; For the unemployed who cry out for work but do not find it. We pray for anyone of our acquaintance who is personally affected by injustice. Forgive us, Lord, if we unwittingly share in the conditions or in a system that perpetuates injustice. Show us how we can serve your children and make your love practical by washing their feet. **Amen** *Mother Theresa of Calcutta*

Heavenly Father, we pray for all of those who have confessed your name in baptism and we remember especially those who experience persecution for their profession of faith. Give to your people repentance for their sins and the strength of your Holy Spirit to live lives worthy of our calling by you.

We thank you Lord God that you promise to us the power of the Holy Spirit to work within us to guide us in your ways and strengthen us in your service. May we never be proud of our own achievements, may we never be overwhelmed with the challenges which face us, recognising that in all things it is your strength which works in us. Whatever we may have to endure or enjoy, we thank you that you walk with us on a known way.

We pray for those who have troubled lives. Those who are addicted to harmful things which threaten their lives, those whose lives have been badly damaged and broken. Lord Jesus we know that you reached out to those whose lives had hit rock bottom and your touch brought forgiveness, healing and change. So we ask that you would enable us to be your healing touch among those who have not known the power of your love. Give us your willingness to be alongside those who suffer and who are in need and may we be faithful messengers of your good news.

Give us strength to bear our sorrows and joys lightly; give us strength to make our love more fruitful in service; give us strength never to disregard those who are poor or in any kind of need; may we never bow before the abuse of power; give us strength to raise our minds high above petty things, and give us the strength lovingly to surrender our strength to your perfect will. **Amen.** *(From an anonymous online writer).*

### **The Lord's Prayer.**

#### **STF 707**

Make me a channel of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;  
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;  
and where there's doubt, true faith in you:

*O Master, grant that I may never seek  
so much to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.  
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;  
where there is darkness, only light;  
and where there's sadness, ever joy:

#### *Refrain*

Make me a channel of your peace.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
in giving unto all that we receive,  
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

### **The Blessing**

Psalm 29:11

The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, grant us a spirit of wisdom and insight to know him clearly. May God enlighten our innermost vision that we may know the great hope to which he has called us, the wealth of his glorious heritage, and the immeasurable scope of his power in us who believe. **Amen.**  
(Based on Ephesians 1:17-19a)

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