

## 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021 6 pm Healing and Refreshing: Here We Go Again!

Led by Ann Gibbons. Meditation and prayers by Lynda Howells

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### **Introduction**

[Ann Gibbons:]

Hello everyone, and welcome to this first healing and refreshing service of 2021 from St John's Church Kenilworth, Sundays at 6pm. I'm Ann, and with Lynda, together we will be leading you through this time together.

Our theme tonight is, 'Here we go Again'. We seem to be always asking you questions. But how does that statement make you feel: excited – yes, let's get on with it? Or maybe you feel anxious or apprehensive? Or possibly a mixture of the two? Our prayer for you tonight, is that you will, during the evening, come to feel that we are not alone, and can persevere, trusting our Father God to lead us, and keeping on going on in the time of the pandemic, and all the stresses that that brings. More about this later.

### **Reading: Psalm 36:5-9**

As we begin I'm just going to read a few verses from Psalm 36. I'm reading verses five to nine.

- 5 Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;  
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
- 6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
your justice like the ocean depths.  
You care for people and animals alike, O LORD.
- 7 How precious is your unfailing love, O God!  
All humanity finds shelter  
in the shadow of your wings.
- 8 You feed them from the abundance of your own house,  
letting them drink from your river of delights.
- 9 For you are the fountain of life,  
the light by which we see.

### **An Epiphany Prayer**

There are times when we seem to fit everything in about Christmas into a very short time. But this isn't how this Christmas Story pans out in the Bible. In a few days' time on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, the season of Epiphany begins, the time

when the Magi ended their journey, following the star that guided them to Bethlehem. Lynda will be reading more about this later.

We begin with a prayer taken from an old hymn that fits with the Epiphany. So let's pray.

Jesus, good above all other,  
Gentle child of gentle mother,  
In a stable born our brother,  
Give us grace to persevere.  
Amen.

### ***Song: From Heaven You Came, Helpless Babe (The Servant King)***

Lynda will bring her meditation to us, and this will be followed by a time of reflection. But first we sing *From Heaven You Came, Helpless Babe, the Servant King*.

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 x 2*

### ***Meditation: Thoughts for a New Year***

[Lynda:] Thoughts for a New Year. Here we go again!

Dear Heavenly Father. I'm writing to You. I don't really know how to put this. What to say, how to write it? We are the start of a new year. Whilst this is supposed to be a positive time, bringing with it good intentions, but in the grand scheme of things, I'm really not sure. 2020 seem to be lost in the fog of COVID-19, lockdown, isolation, fear, loss, loss of human contact, no hugs, no kisses, no fist-pumping, not the same as the human touch, and yet it has to be done. And it still goes on. Discussions about the weather have been overtaken by, "What tier are you in?" Where do we go from here? Can we plan or dare to dream of a return to some form of normality - if we can remember what that is? Shall we try? Another new year, bringing with it good intentions.

Father, I'm sure I'm speaking for all of us in one way or another. Here we go again. New Year's resolutions are old ones disguised in a different way.

I will lose weight, get fit, be organised. Oh, yes, probably should be the first resolution, be disciplined with regard to my quiet times with You, Father, resolve to put You first, to thank You for Your love for me. Oh, it's so easy to write these words down, and even say them out loud, but I'm missing the point somewhere. These thoughts and musings are all about me. I will, I must, I should. But Lord, I can't. Oh yes, I will start off with good intentions, but I know that when I wander off, or go wrong, the quiet voice will accuse me, "That's it. You're a failure, useless." Then I stop. I wait. I listen. Your gentle voice breaks through into my thoughts. I pick up Your precious Holy Word. It's all there, written down for me, You, Your promises. Your unending love, You who never gives up on me, on you, even when we give up on ourselves. My resolutions are all about me. I will, I must. Where are You in these? Will I never learn? My first commitment and resolution should be to look to You first, include You in my plans, from the start, and ask You to help me.

Yes, You have blessed me with a free will to make my own choices and decisions. But as a parent guides a child, I really need Your guidance, Your strength. That still, small voice which speaks to me gently. It's up to me. Do I listen, or ignore You? My choice. Who are You, Lord? Who are You? Do I know You, really know You? Do I at times merely pay lip service to You? Or do I in my heart truly believe You are my Saviour, the One who died for me, who paid off my debt of sin and set me free, free to live under the shelter of Your love? Even when things go wrong, You're always there to guide me, to put me right. Sometimes suddenly, or sometimes quietly, realisation comes and I can say, "Yes, Lord, I do know You, really know You." At the risk of boring You and myself, Father, I repeat, it's like this. But it's a new year, in the terms of our calendar. And yes, here we go again, full of good intentions.

Our beloved Father, as we enter into this new year, some of us with the force and energy of a violent wind, strong, full of good intentions, others tottering along with unsteady steps, just like a toddler learning to walk. The one good intention, a new year resolution we can all choose to make, is to follow You. You are not to be used as an ATM machine, there just to give us what we asked for or demand. You are our loving Parent, our Heavenly Father, who knows what is best for us, and will always answer our prayers in the best possible way, for You and for us. You need us, though, to come to You as children, trusting You and loving You. Heavenly Father, we can choose to say yes, yes to You to guide us, day by day. Small steps to walk the path You show us, day by day, under Your grace and mercy, praying for the fruit of the Holy Spirit to be born anew in us, precious Lord, that we may shine as a message of hope and guidance, as a star in the east shone and guided the wise men to worship Jesus in that stable. Amidst the confusion of not really sure where this year will take us, we are reminded of Your words in Jeremiah 29, verse 11.

'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'

We have a gracious God who has given us freedom of choice. Will you choose to put your trust in your heavenly Father, live your lives with Jesus at the centre? Will you trust him to maybe take you on a different path this year?

Dare to change your plans, your path. Be bold in the name of the Lord, to step out to live your life to the full, without fear. Remember His promise for each one of us in Jeremiah and make it your own.

We kneel to adore You and worship You, our Saviour, and to serve You, where You send us. So happy and blessed 2021, whatever it brings, knowing that we are all safe in the shadow of His wings. Amen.

And now there'll be a time of reflection.

***Meditation Video***



## **Hymn: My Jesus, My Saviour (Shout to the Lord)**

1. My Jesus, my Saviour  
Lord there is none like You  
All of my days I want to praise  
The wonders of Your mighty love
2. My comfort, my shelter  
Tower of refuge and strength  
Let every breath, all that I am  
Never cease to worship You

### *Chorus:*

Shout to the Lord all the Earth, let us sing  
Power and majesty, praise to the King  
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar  
At the sound of Your name  
I sing for joy at the work of Your hand  
Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand  
Nothing compares to the promise I have In You

*Repeat verses 1 & 2 and chorus, then repeat chorus again*

## **Prayer Activity**

[Ann:]

I think I've mentioned before, usually when our services are in the church building, we have a prayer activity. And we thought we would try one tonight.

In 2019, December, the first Sunday of Advent, we spent time building a crib, to prepare a welcome, which reminded us that Jesus came from the glory of Heaven to be born in very humble surroundings. And also, that we were putting Christ in first in all we do. We then put strips of cloth, similar to these. And we each laid them across the crib, and formed a lining.



Actually the woven strips became quite firm and strong enough to hold a baby. It was quite difficult to take apart when I'd started, and sometimes I wished I hadn't, but then maybe we wouldn't have been able to move on as Jesus had to.

After the Magi had been with their gifts, they were told to, in a dream, not to go back the way they had come, and not to return to Herod. And also Joseph had a dream, to take Mary and the baby Jesus, and flee to Egypt, effectively becoming refugees.

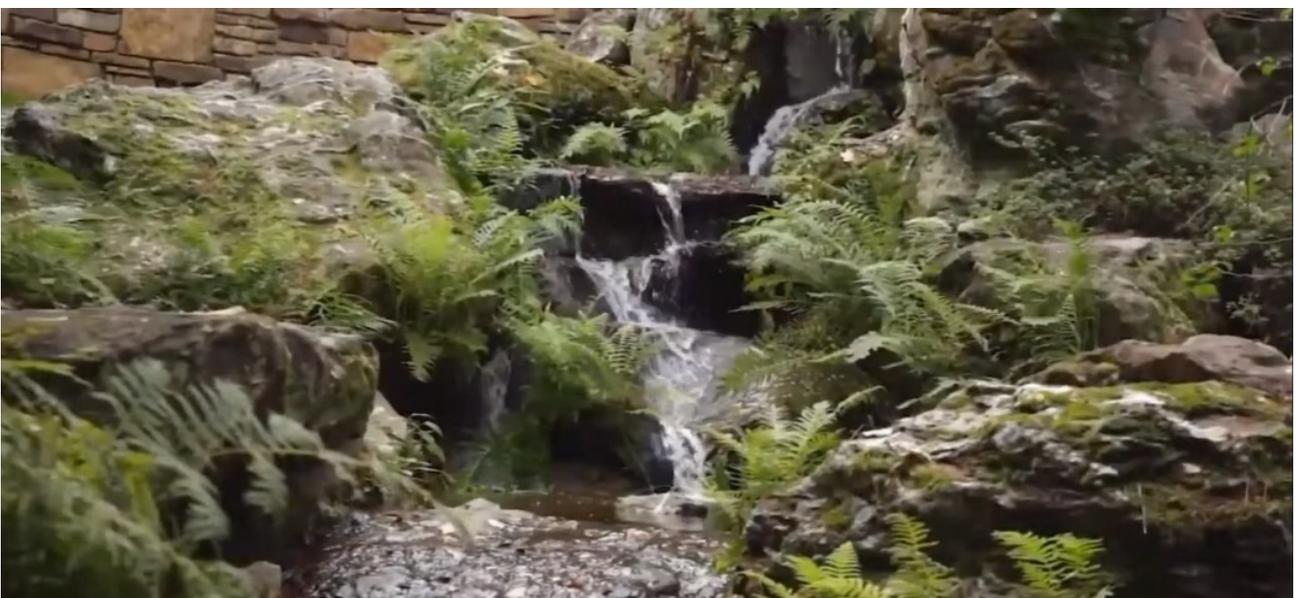


So we still have the cradle. Its use is finished with, with maybe a few strips of cloth left in their haste to escape.

Our church calendar gives us continuity: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Candlemas to end the Christmas season, before we start the time of Lent, and Easter, thinking of the Cross and of the Stone that was moved away from the tomb at the resurrection of Christ, giving us promise and hope.

The cradle is here. We would like you to write on your piece of paper that you have, your hopes and dreams, your resolutions, or thoughts of how you want to put Christ first, to persevere, keeping on going on with the promise that He is with you, rekindling ourselves, rededicating ourselves to Father, Son and Holy Spirit again. You choose what you would like to write. And then imagine yourself placing your paper in the cradle, once again welcoming Jesus into your everyday, putting Christ first in all we do. There will be some music playing whilst we are doing this, or if you would rather just sit quietly, then that's fine to do that. The end of the video will signal that the end of the prayer time.

*Prayer Video*



We hope you found that time useful. Let's pray over our words.

Lord Jesus, thank You for the words we have written, and the thoughts that are still buzzing around in our minds, maybe to write later. We give them to You Lord, to Your praise and glory. Amen.

### **Song: Joy Has Dawned**

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| <p>1. Joy has dawned upon the world<br/>Promised from creation<br/>God's salvation now unfurled<br/>Hope for every nation<br/>Not with fanfares from above<br/>Not with scenes of glory<br/>But a humble gift of love<br/>Jesus born of Mary</p> <p>2. Sounds of wonder fill the sky<br/>With the songs of angels<br/>As the mighty Prince of Life<br/>Shelters in a stable<br/>Hands that set each star in place<br/>Shaped the earth in darkness<br/>Cling now to a mother's breast<br/>Vulnerable and helpless</p> | <p>3. Shepherds bow before the Lamb<br/>Gazing at the glory<br/>Gifts of men from distant lands<br/>Prophecy the story<br/>Gold – a King is born today<br/>Incense – God is with us<br/>Myrrh – His death will make a way<br/>And by His blood He'll win us</p> <p>4. Son of Adam Son of heaven<br/>Given as a ransom<br/>Reconciling God and man<br/>Christ, our mighty Champion<br/>What a Saviour! what a Friend!<br/>What a glorious mystery!<br/>Once a babe in Bethlehem<br/>Now the Lord of history</p> |
|---|--|

Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Gloria in excelsis Deo

Come to Bethlehem and see  
He whose birth the angels sing  
Come adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord the newborn King

Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Gloria in excelsis Deo

### **The Wise Men's Journey**

This is taken from the book, *Cloth for the Cradle* by the Wild Goose Worship Group<sup>1</sup>.

Wise man: There will be no camels. We are going on horseback, at least for some of the way. And we won't arrive there a few hours after everyone else. It will be weeks, perhaps, or months. We are not in a hurry. This is not the way we work. We are not Europeans. We will discuss the phenomenon, the star. And if it does not go away, and if we still feel curious, we will travel. We will look in the wrong place, yes, I admit that. Because wise men, potentates, intellectuals, call us what you like, we're not infallible. We expect a new power to emerge from the side of the old one. We expect the destination we seek to resemble what our common sense deduces. We will be upset, angry even, to find that Herod is ignorant. And that his living space is not the birthplace. We will find it hard and intellectually demeaning to bow this knee to the son of refugees. And all this, all this upset will be compounded, when it comes to journeying back, and we discover, we have to go home a different way. This is the trouble with God. He does not let you leave as you come.

1 ISBN 9781901557015 <https://www.ionabooks.com/product/cloth-for-the-cradle/>

He sends you back stripped of your presumptions, making for home by another way.

### **Intercessions**

[Lynda:]

We'll now have our prayer time. And as I've said to you before. normally at our healing and refreshing services in church, Ann and I often pray with anyone in need of personal prayer. And as this cannot happen at the moment, there will be an opportunity for you in this prayer time to ask your Heavenly Father for help, whatever you need. Just tell Him one-to-one, what's on your mind.

Father God, we bring our prayers to You now. Help us to truly believe that You listen to us. You hear us. You will never turn Your back on us.

We thank You for the hope we have with another vaccine being rolled out. But there are still so many people suffering with and because of the coronavirus.

Lord, into the darkness in our lives, please shine Your light of peace, joy and hope. Amen.

As we start a new year, we start a different relationship with Europe. Many will be worried for lots of reasons, how we trade, how people could still come here to work, and travel generally. Whatever our worries or concerns about the future,

Lord, into the darkness, please shine Your light of love, joy, and peace and hope. Amen.

The pandemic is causing so much pain, anxiety, grief and worry, which is felt especially by our NHS workers, our teachers, and all the caring professions.

Lord, into their darkness, please shine Your light of love, joy, peace, and hope. Amen.

So many people are living with uncertainty, how to pay the bills, employment issues, caring for the children's educational needs at home. How will we, how will they cope?

Lord, into their darkness, please shine Your light of love, joy, peace and hope. Amen.

Many people are living in isolation and struggling with the loss of human contact, many stuck in flats and apartments, small places,

Lord, into their darkness, please shine Your light of love, joy, peace, comfort and hope. Amen.

For refugees and all fleeing their homelands to find safety and a better way of living,

Lord, into their darkness, please shine Your light of love, joy, peace and hope. Amen.

For world leaders, that they would set aside personal agendas, and come together to work for the good of the people they serve,

Lord into their darkness, please shine Your light of love, hope and compassion. Amen.

There will now be a moment's quiet for you to talk to your Heavenly Father and to tell Him whatever's on your hearts.

Ann and I pray for you all watching this service, that you will be refreshed and renewed.

Lord, into any darkness there may be in our lives, please shine Your light of love, joy, peace and hope, and fill us afresh with courage and wisdom, whatever the future brings.

We thank You, Father that as the sun rising and setting day by day is constant, so Your love and care for each one of us is constant and never changes. Amen.

**Song: 10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord, O My Soul)**

*Chorus:*

Bless The Lord, O my soul,  
O my soul,  
Worship His holy name;  
Sing like never before,  
O my soul,  
I'll worship Your holy name.

1. The sun comes up,  
It's a new day dawning;  
It's time to sing Your song again.  
Whatever may pass  
And whatever lies before me  
Let me be singing  
When the evening comes.

*Chorus*

2. You're rich in love  
And You're slow to anger;  
Your name is great  
And Your heart is kind.  
For all Your goodness  
I will keep on singing  
Ten thousand reasons  
For my heart to find.

*Chorus*

3. And on that day  
When my strength is failing,  
The end draws near  
And my time has come,  
Still my soul will  
Sing Your praise unending  
Ten thousand years  
And then forevermore

*Chorus x 2*

Yes, I'll worship Your holy name.  
Lord, I'll worship Your holy name.

**Blessing**

[Ann: ]

To end I'm going to say the last verse of the hymn that we read earlier, as a blessing.

Lord, in all our doings guide us;  
Pride and hate shall never divide us;  
We'll go on with Thee beside us,  
And with joy we'll persevere.  
Amen.

Shall we say the Grace together?

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all  
and those who we love,  
now, and forevermore. Amen.**

If this evening's service has set you thinking, can I suggest that you access this morning's 8 o'clock service on BBC Radio 4 via BBC Sounds<sup>2</sup>? There was so much in this service. It talked of Job's epiphany, a revelation, when God challenged him by saying. "Were you there when the stars were put in the sky and the Earth was formed?"<sup>3</sup> It went on to say, "Jesus born in a stable, because he had no home. But the stable is a place where we are very much at home"<sup>4</sup>. The service ended with a prayer written by Thomas Merton<sup>5</sup>. And I know friends from St John's who will enjoy the Epiphany hymn, and are missing singing this together in church. And they will enjoy hearing 'Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning'.

Thank you for joining us. We pray for a peaceful 2021 for us all. With love from Lynda and Ann. Good night.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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2 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000qxlj>

3 Job 38:4

4 Poem by G.K. Chesterton

5 From *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself,

and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.