

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Service at Home 11th January 2026
Prepared by Pat Fry**

Last Sunday we were still in the 12 days of Christmas, thinking about the Wise Men seeking the newborn King. Today we jump ahead 30 years, to the first story about Jesus as a mature man, well known locally as the carpenter at Nazareth. It's a big jump, a jump so many people fail to make, thinking of Jesus only as the baby in the stable, to be put away till next year with the decorations. So let's begin with a hymn that reminds us who this baby proved to be:

Hymn 346 Christ is the world's light.

https://youtu.be/q7dWT1Eo_5w?si=Wvme6Jb9Qm6jaAYn

Christ is the world's light Christ and none other;

Born in our darkness he became our brother,

if we have seen him, we have seen the Father

Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's peace, Christ and none other;

no-one can serve him and despise another;
who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's life, Christ and none other,

sold once for silver, murdered here our brother -

he, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father.

Glory to God on high.

Give God the glory, God and none other;
give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;
Give God the glory, God with us, my brother.

Glory to God on high.

Fred Pratt Green 1903-2000

Prayer of praise and confession

Gracious God, as we move through a month where the weather is often cold and cheerless, we so easily become down hearted. A few weeks ago we were celebrating Jesus' birth and singing carols joyfully, with a sense of wonder. Now it is time to think about Jesus' adult life, and that too should leave us awestruck.

We bring our thanks and praise that Jesus demonstrated what a God-filled human life could be.

We bring our thanks and praise for all that Jesus taught about the deepest truths of human life.

We bring our thanks and praise for Jesus' death and resurrection, and all that means to us now.

But we confess we often get bogged down in the everyday and lose our hold on these precious truths.

So now lookback over the last few days. Give thanks for what has been good, and confess where you have gone wrong, or lost heart, been short-tempered or inconsiderate.

Seek God's forgiveness, and ask help to follow more faithfully in the way of Jesus.

Know that God is more ready to forgive than we are to admit our need, and know that the promise of the help of the Holy Spirit is there for each of us as we truly seek it, even when we cannot sense it. Thanks be to God. Amen.

In the cold days of January it's easy to feel a bit flat, a "nothing-much time," dull after the hustle and bustle of Christmas. Spring seems long way off.

The lectionary readings though, provide a springboard to start looking forward, opening up the story of Jesus earthly ministry. The Old Testament lesson sets the scene.

Introduction to reading from Isaiah

There are several passages in Isaiah about God's promise to restore the exiled Jewish people to their homeland, about the glory of the Lord being revealed and the whole human race seeing it (Isaiah 40; 5) and about a Saviour who will make this happen;; one in particular that is often read at Christmas has strong words like Mighty God, government, authority and power that shall have no end (Isaiah 9:6-7). Often we don't hear about the suffering servant till Lent as we prepare for Good Friday. But today the set OT reading moves us towards that understanding.

Reading: Isaiah 42; 1-4

Reflection

I wonder if you enjoyed the book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, which was very popular a couple of years ago. It's a delightfully illustrated moral tale of four unlikely friends travelling into the unknown together. I recently bought the sequel, and when I saw today's Bible readings, a delightful exchange from the book sprang to mind.

"What is a sign of true strength?" asked the boy. "Gentleness" replied the horse. Isn't this passage a picture of gentle strength?

I had always just assumed this passage describes Jesus, but doing some background reading discovered its original meaning may have been rather different. Perhaps as Isaiah was writing he was

thinking of the Jewish people, as a community, as God's servant – a servant people. At the time he was writing, God's chosen people were a broken nation, feeling lost and despairing in Exile. One suggestion is that here the prophet is challenging the people to recognise how they ought to be living, how to rebuild their identity, not as warmongers, but as seekers after justice, supporting the weak and struggling.

Only much later did the reading become linked to the person of Jesus, and with very good reason as we shall see in our New Testament lesson.

But setting all that on one side, this is a passage that has given many of us encouragement in difficult times: that wonderful verse:

"He will not break off a bent reed or snuff out a flickering lamp."

Many of us have sometimes felt like bent reeds or flickering lamps, worn down by circumstances, health problems, daunting tasks or sheer exhaustion. Here we have found an assurance that God will deal gently with us, not condemn us but uphold us, just as the poet wrote in the beautiful poem *Footsteps*. Sometimes we can hold on to its truth, sometimes it seems tantalisingly out of reach.

Take a moment now to give thanks for a time when you have felt upheld and supported,

Gospel reading: Matthew 3 11-17

John the Baptist had recognised that Jesus was the one whose coming he had been preparing for. No wonder he reacted with shock when Jesus came to him for baptism. And we too find it puzzling.

If Jesus was without sin, what need for a baptism as a sign of repentance? Here Jesus is confirming the importance of John's message, and identifying himself totally with the people around him, ready to make the changes required.

He's saying yes to John's message, the kingdom of God is close at hand, it is time to get ready.

Jesus is following the same way as the people around him to demonstrate his intention to walk in God's way; he is demonstrating that he is a human being, experiencing the same struggles as other ordinary people, having to make difficult choices with only the tools available to ordinary human beings.

And then we have the voice from heaven, God confirming that Jesus is indeed his Son, in whom he is pleased, echoing the words from our Old Testament lesson. It's a clear mandate to Jesus to take the teaching of that passage as guidance in the decisions he will have to make about how to carry out his mission.

That's the subject of our next hymn

Hymn Jesus in your life we see you

This lovely hymn is not included in Singing the Faith, but is in Methodist Hymns Old and New. It quickly became one of my favourite hymns, and Methodists normally sing it to Blaenwern (Love Divine)

Jesus in your life we see you
making God's compassion known
surely you have borne our sorrows
surely made our pain your own!
See your touch bring hope and healing,
see your word set captives free,
see you suffer, mocked, rejected,
dying on the shameful tree.

Risen Lord you reign in glory:
but your wounded hands still show
you can share the outcast's torment
sound the depths of human woe,
know where greed exploits the helpless,
hear the addicts lonely cry
grieve at so much waste and heartbreak,
feel for all who question "why?"

Risen Lord you bear their sorrow
know how much they need your peace;
as you once healed broken bodies,
offered captive souls release,
take us, use us, in your service,
we would follow where you lead;
only your divine compassion
meets the depth of human need.

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Reflection

We have read two Bible passages which offer comfort: the promise of God's care and compassion demonstrated so powerfully so completely by Jesus himself. But there is challenge here too.

Isaiah lived in difficult times, when many of his people felt abandoned by God, and overwhelmed by despair. Yet in those dreadful circumstances he urged them to live a life that sought justice, and showed compassion in caring for those in need.

Jesus held fast to this calling in spite of all the pressures to become the popular military messiah many people wanted; held fast in spite of all the hostility from those in power. We know the whole story of what it cost him.

And we too are called to seek to walk in the way of Jesus, to seek justice, to show active compassion, whatever the limitations of our situation;

even if we can do very little, even if it feels as if the only thing we can do is pray, we too are called to hold on to the truths that Jesus taught us and live in the light of that teaching.

Prayers of concern

Hold on your mind those beautiful words from Isaiah: "The bruised and broken reed he will not break; the dimly burning wick he will not put out."

Bring before God people of war-torn lands;
people who have fled as refugees,
people whose homes and livelihood have been destroyed,
the injured and bereaved,
those who feel so desperate they have resorted to violence to protect their families and their freedom.

Lord we pray for peace.

Bring before God people relying on food banks and community pantries, in our country where the supermarket shelves are full, and pray for the many volunteers who staff these services.

Lord we pray for a fairer society in our own land.

Bring before God the people you know personally in particular need at this time.

Lord we pray that they may find support and comfort in their time of need.

Lord when we fear we are losing hope, or feel weary and worn down, let us see in our minds the image of your resurrection, and let that be a source of courage and strength. With that picture in our minds, and in the company of your Holy Spirit, help us each to face the challenges and struggles of living as your people here and now.

Through the love of Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn 233 When Jesus came to Jordan

<https://youtu.be/koQKCfXkrKE>

When Jesus came to Jordan
to be baptised by John,
He did not come for pardon,
but as his Father's son.
He came to share repentance
with all who mourn their sins,
to speak the vital sentence,
with which good news begins.

He came to share temptation
our utmost woe and loss,
for us and our salvation
to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
on him, the Son of Man,
the hidden years had ended,
the age of grace began.

Come Holy Spirit aid us,
to keep the vows we make;
this very day invade us
and every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction
the gift we covet most,
to share the resurrection
that leads to Pentecost

Fred Pratt Green 1903-2000

Blessing

The love of the faithful Creator,
the peace of the wounded healer,
the joy of the challenging Spirit,
the Hope of the Three in One
surround and encourage us
today and for ever. Amen

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