

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
20 - 26 December 2015

Thought for the Week:

At the centre of this week, of course, is the Christmas celebration for which we have been waiting and preparing throughout Advent. Much has been said and written about the sentimentality of this season, and of the various ways in which it is abused or misunderstood. But, the truth is that even the call to "put Christ back into Christmas" misses the point. Christmas is not, essentially, the celebration of a baby, no matter how divine. What we celebrate is the new order that is marked by this baby's birth. In Christ the first signs of God's Reign, which has invaded our world, are seen. In Christ God's Reign is now available and accessible to us. In Christ the world of God's dreams – the world we long for – is becoming a reality among us. Even for Jesus, his mission and message were never about himself. It was all about the Reign of God.

The readings this week, including those for Christmas Day, seek to move us away from any picture postcard illusions about this season. They refuse to leave us in a happy, comfortable celebration that asks nothing of us. Rather, the Scriptures on which we will meditate this week will challenge us to choose between the "kingdoms of this world" and the kingdom of God. They are subversive, revolutionary readings that call for a radically different way of being in the world. The point of this celebration is not so much that we worship the baby, but that we follow the baby in his mission to establish God's dream on the earth. As Richard Rohr says, that's why Jesus never says, "Worship me". He only ever says, "Follow me". This is what we will explore this week.

Sunday 20 December 2015

Reading: Luke 1:39-55

Reflection: Only two of the Gospels have accounts of Christ's birth – Luke and Matthew – and they are very different from each other. In Luke's Gospel the conceptions and births of John the Baptist and

Jesus are placed in parallel, revealing the significance both of the prophet who prepared the way, and of the One for whom the way was prepared. In today's reading the two mothers come together in a dramatic encounter. As Mary approaches the home of her relative, Elizabeth, the unborn John leaps in Elizabeth's womb. Then, as Elizabeth welcomes Mary into her home, Mary responds with a song of praise. What is amazing about this song is that it does not focus only on Mary's blessedness, but on the salvation and blessing of God on God's people, and on the earth.

The *Magnificat*, as Mary's song has come to be known, is essentially a song of protest. It notes how God raises up the poor and vulnerable while bringing down the rich and powerful. It's a song of equality, of empowerment, of justice and of love. Even before Jesus is born, his mission of justice and peace is proclaimed.

How can you participate in God's blessing of your life and of the world today?

Practice for Today: Go back and read Mary's *Magnificat* again. As you read, open your heart and mind to what God may want to say to you about God's Reign. Then go into your day looking for the signs of God's Reign in your world. Notice what a difference this discipline of listening makes to your life, and to your impact on those around you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I am listening, O God – tell me more about your Reign.

Monday 21 December 2015

Reading: Colossians 1:15-20

Reflection: As we draw near to the Christmas celebration, it is important to put the birth of Jesus into its rightful context. We cannot really understand the meaning of the incarnation – that moment when God became human and took on flesh – unless we understand the whole story of God's plan of salvation. The birth of Jesus was not an isolated event. It is a significant part of a much bigger plan in which God seeks to bring the whole of creation into wholeness and oneness through the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

In the letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul quotes one of the earliest Christian hymns in order to explain the true nature of Jesus. In beautifully poetic and powerful words, Paul speaks of the existence of the Christ in eternity. Christ is God's image – the way God is revealed in the cosmos – and the entire universe was created through Christ. But, this act of creation was not random. It was for the purpose of bringing the whole of creation into reconciled, united, loving relationship with God. The birth of Jesus at Christmas time was a significant moment in this plan of God, and so as we gather at the manger, we remember that God is bringing all of creation into loving intimacy with God.

What does it mean for you to celebrate Christmas with this eternal and cosmic perspective? How does God's salvation of the universe connect with God's gift of salvation to you today?

Practice for Today: One of the most profound ways for us to experience what it means to be saved is to connect with God's salvation in the lives of others and in our world. This means that we seek to become channels of God's grace and healing to others. Today, look for every opportunity to share God's saving and healing grace with others today, and, as you do, experience the power of God's grace anew in your own life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I share your saving grace with the world, O God, so I experience a touch of grace in my own life again.

Tuesday 22 December 2015

Reading: Ephesians 2:11-22

Reflection: It is disturbing that so many people of faith use the Christmas season as a battleground in which a particular, exclusive version of Christianity is defended against those who are believed to be attacking it. In the light of Christ's grand vision of a healed and united world, the choice to exclude others over their preferred greeting, for example, is both petty and misguided.

But, the writer to the Ephesian Church offers a very different perspective on Christ's work. In Christ all people – Jew and Gentile – have been united with God and with one another. The walls that separate us have been broken down, and we are all members of

God's family. That's why the song of the angels in the Christmas story is "joy to the world" – not just joy to some of the world. But, the truth that we have been drawn into a new, inclusive, Christ-centred community needs to take hold of our hearts. It is not enough for us to go through physical motions of worship (like the writer's example of circumcision). We need a change deep within us that leads us to live with same welcoming, humble grace that Jesus demonstrated from the moment of his birth until his ascension.

Who needs you to welcome and include them today?

Practice for Today: At Christmas we are invited to receive Christ again – into our hearts, our lives, and our world. But, as Jesus so often taught, it is when we receive others in the name of Jesus that we receive Jesus himself. Today, work to be welcoming and accepting of everyone you meet, no matter who they are or what they may believe.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I welcome you, Jesus, so I welcome others in your name.

Wednesday 23 December 2015

Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Reflection: The Old Testament prophets knew that a time would have to come when God made God's presence and purpose known to the world in a new way. They could see that God was at work in human history, and they could also see that history was moving toward a significant moment when God would do something new to bring healing and justice to all nations. But, as the Scriptures indicate (see 1 Peter 1:10-12 and 1 Corinthians 2:7-9) they struggled to understand exactly what God was doing. So they spoke of the hope to come, of the Messiah, and of God's Reign. But should they have been around to witness how this actually played out in the life of Christ, they would certainly have been overcome with awe and wonder!

Centuries later the writer of Peter's second letter spoke about the confidence he had in the prophets' message because of what he had witnessed in the life of Jesus. He recognised that God's plan had been fulfilled in Christ, and that the Scriptures were God's gift to

help us understand what Christ's mission meant. His conclusion was that in Jesus God's glory had been revealed, and God's grace and salvation was now available to all people. Christmas is not God's Plan B because of sin. Nor is it a random event. Rather, Christmas is a significant moment in God's plan to save and heal the cosmos.

What does it mean for you to experience God's glory in Jesus today?

Practice for Today: Make some time to go back to one or two of your favourite Bible passages about Jesus. Read them slowly and meditatively, and ask God to reveal God's glory to you again in Jesus. Then allow this new experience of God to shape your faith, your worship, and your actions throughout the day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me your glory revealed in Jesus, and let it change me, O God.

Christmas Eve Thursday 24 December 2015

Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Reflection: Volumes could be written (and have been) about today's reading. There are so many significant elements in this story that it is clear the Gospel writer is sending a very subversive message to his readers. The passage begins with noting the "powers-that-be" at the time Jesus was born. It shows how the decisions of these powers impacted the lives of ordinary citizens – causing a young, pregnant woman and her new husband to undertake a tough journey to satisfy the whim of an emperor. But, then the writer goes on to show how, in a hidden corner of the world, unnoticed by those in power, God was at work in subversive ways. The first people to be aware of God's activity are shepherds – considered unclean, and forbidden to testify in a court of law. Yet, it is to these outcasts that God's messengers come in glory and proclaim God's saving act. The words they use are also significant. Where the Romans used force of arms to create their *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace), the angels declare that God is bringing peace on earth. Where Caesar had been called a Saviour, now the angels call this baby Saviour, Lord and Messiah. Unknown to the powerful emperor, a new world order was being established right under his nose!

In a world where "might is right", where "bigger is better", and where it's "survival of the fittest", we can often miss the quiet, subversive work of God's Reign. The Scriptures show, again and again, how God works in hidden places with marginalised people, to bring about God's salvation. This Christmas, let's not despise the small people, the small actions, the small places in our lives. Let's open our hearts and minds to the Reign of God that is often revealed in these hidden places and people. And let's celebrate the Reign of God that is so radically different from human system of wealth, power and status.

Practice for Today: With all the messages we hear and see everyday, telling us that we must be more important and have more stuff, it's easy to miss the hidden work of God's Reign in our lives. If this has happened to you, take time today to confess it, and then ask God to change your heart so that you can embrace the small, but significant, activity of God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I get caught up in the pride and striving of the world, O God, forgive me, and call me back to your gentle Reign.

Christmas Day Friday 25 December 2015

Reading: John 1:1-14

Reflection: The writer of John's Gospel is very clear in his purpose for writing – it is so that his readers may come to believe in the incarnate Christ. Here at the start of the Gospel he begins by making sure his readers know exactly who this Jesus is. The life of Jesus did not begin at birth. Unlike Matthew and Luke, John begins his Gospel in eternity, before the creation of the universe. The phrase "In the beginning..." is reminiscent of Genesis 1:1, and John's Gospel reveals the Word to be intimately involved in the creation of the universe. Then, in verse 14, the Word becomes flesh. This is the point of the incarnation for John – that the One who was before all things, who is one with God, has become human and lived among us as the man, Jesus. It is this incarnation, this amazing truth of God coming into human reality and experience that we celebrate today.

The rest of today's passage is a summary of what will come in the Gospel. John the Baptist bears witness to Jesus – as the disciples, and ultimately all believers will be called to do. Jesus brings God's light into the world, but the darkness seeks to oppose the light (unsuccessfully). And finally, there is the confession that "we" – the community which shares in the message of the Gospel – have seen the glory of this Jesus. The account that follows is not hearsay – it is the testimony of eyewitnesses.

How have you experienced the Word of God, the Light of Life, coming to you this Christmas day? How can you bear witness to it?

Practice for Today: There is really only one appropriate response to the awesome message of the incarnation – praise. And as we praise God's grace and glory, we bear witness to the life of Christ that has touched and healed us. Today let your celebrations be filled to overflowing with praise.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For becoming flesh and living with us, O Word of God, I praise and thank you.

Saturday 26 December 2015

Reading: Psalm 148

Reflection: Yesterday we celebrated the Word of God who created all things, and who became flesh and lived among us. Today, we join all creation in praising the Creator. It is all too easy to get caught up in the humanity of Jesus to the exclusion of his divinity. It's important to remember that Jesus experienced life as we do. Without the humanity of Christ, we would never be able to follow him as an example of the best way to be human. But, it is also important to remember that in Christ we see the best reflection of God as well. Anytime our view of God contradicts the character of Jesus, we have misunderstood God's nature. As we look at Jesus, we are seeing what God, the Creator of the universe, is like. And when we allow Jesus to reveal God's nature to us, we can only respond in thanksgiving and praise – along with all creation.

Notice the grace and generosity of God in this Psalm. God brings all things into being. God makes God's people strong and honours God's faithful ones. It's like all of creation is joined in this amazing,

wondrous, dance of life and celebration, as we, together, enjoy the life and grace and strength of God. What a pity that we have allowed ourselves to feel so separate from creation – and from our Creator.

What specific characteristic of God do you see revealed in Jesus, and in creation, that you would like to give thanks for today?

Practice for Today: When we read a Psalm like this we can't help but realise that our entire lives are a gift. Even though we struggle and suffer, we also know joy, friendship, life, and love. And we also have this amazing earth as our home. Today, take time to reflect on God's gift of life and of God's Self to you, and give thanks.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your gift of life, and of yourself, I give you thanks, O God.

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