

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

31 December 2017 – 06 January 2018

Thought for the Week:

Christmas is not over! In the Church Calendar, Christmas Day is just the first of twelve days of Christmas. In this season we are called not just to welcome and celebrate the incarnate Christ Child, but to mediate on the meaning and purpose of the incarnation. We are called to understand not just who this baby was, but what he came to do. This means that we have a whole season to understand the Reign of God through the lens of the nativity story - which gives us a perspective we don't get at other times of the year.

What we see in the nativity is not just that Christmas is a gift, and a time of peace, joy, and love. We also learn to understand why this gift was necessary. We also learn to see what stands in the way of peace, joy, and love in our world. And we learn to understand how the life and message of Jesus confronts the evil in our society and calls us into a whole new order of living and behaving.

This week we meditate on the nativity story and what it reveals to us about Jesus and his mission - which is also our mission as followers of Christ.

Sunday 31 December 2017

Reading: Luke 2:22-40

Reflection: Like good Jewish parents, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to dedicate him to God. The Gospel writer notes that they brought the offering that was required of those who could not afford a sheep, which indicates that Jesus was born into humble circumstances. But, in the Temple two strangers approached the family. The first was Simeon who believed that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. He was the first person to recognise Jesus' unique calling, and he also seems to have been one of the few people who understood what Jesus' ministry would be about. He told Mary that Jesus would raise up and bring down many - words that echo Mary's own song in Luke 1 - that he would generate

opposition, and that a sword would pierce Mary's own soul. Simeon probably didn't see the details of Jesus' life and death, but he knew his world and the Scriptures well enough to know what would happen to someone who proclaimed and lived by the values and priorities of God's Reign. He also sensed that by doing the work he was called to Jesus would bring life and restoration to those who received him.

The second person to approach the family was Anna. She also recognised the special calling of this Child, and praised God - becoming, after the shepherds, one of the first witnesses to Jesus. Old widows were not important people in Israel, so, once again, the writer shows how God's Reign was most quickly and easily accepted by those who were most marginalised in society.

This reading challenges us in two ways. The first is to recognise the true nature of Jesus' mission, and to live as participants in his work of salvation through justice, compassion and self-giving. The second is to learn to listen more carefully to those who are outside of the halls of power and prestige, for they are often the ones who have the best grasp of what God is seeking to do in society.

How can you learn from the least to participate in God's mission today?

Practice for Today: The discipline of listening is neglected too often. We live in a world where so many people work so hard to be heard, that it is difficult to avoid joining the fray, and it is almost impossible to listen through all the noise. But, if we make listening a priority, we can develop the skill, and hear the whisper of God's Spirit through the voices of those who are silenced, marginalised, and excluded. Practice listening carefully today, especially to those whose voices are the most difficult to hear.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I listen to the least, O God, I hear the whisper of your Spirit.

New Year's Day Monday 01 January 2018

Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Reflection: Time can often be seen as our enemy. Our language gives us away - we speak of deadlines and "racing time". But, when

we view time in this way, we inevitably become colder, harder, more frustrated and more easily angered. It is hard to love and serve when time is constantly pressurising us.

Today's poem from Ecclesiastes gives us a different view of time. Here we see that time is in God's hands, and that God is at work with the things of eternity in the midst of time. If we will allow God to work in our own hearts, then we will discover that God places "eternity in our hearts", and we will begin to be free from the tyranny of time. When this happens, we are able to trust that God really does make all things beautiful in God's time, and so we are freed to be compassionate, gracious, loving and attentive to the needs of others.

In biblical terms this means that we shift from being driven by a *chronos* view of time, rooted in a sense of urgency and the pressure of the clock, to a *kairos* view of time, in which we are open to God's significant moments, and the restful rhythms of eternity. When our time is rooted in God's rhythms and priorities, we not only lose our stress, but we are opened to the ways God may want to use us to allow eternity to break into the lives of those around us.

May this year be a quest for us to nurture "eternity in our hearts" and to allow God's time to lead us into deeper worship of God, and more gracious service of those around us.

Practice for Today: One good way to grasp how eternity is working in your life is to practice the discipline of thanksgiving. Being thankful slows us down, reminds us of how God has been at work in our lives, and builds our trust for the future. Try to give thanks as often as you can today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, God, for the gift of time and for teaching me to use it well.

Tuesday 02 January 2018

Reading: James 3:13-18

Reflection: Are you concerned about the world? Do you wish it was a more just place? Do you long for a way to make some positive contribution to the world, even if it's just a small one? Many of us feel this way, which is why we make New Year's resolutions and join

charitable organisations.

All of this is good, but James suggests that, along with these good actions, there is a simple, daily habit we can develop that helps to bring justice and grace into our corner of the world. He calls it a "humble lifestyle". He describes this kind of life as peaceful, merciful, gentle, pure and obedient to God's ways. Those who live like this resist things like jealousy and selfish ambition, which bring much pain into the world. A humble lifestyle, says James, plants seeds of peace and reaps a harvest of righteousness (the word can also be translated as "justice"). This means that, in order to contribute to a just and peaceful world, we do not need to have an international platform, and we do not need to do great, public acts. Rather, our world becomes more just and peaceful when we each, in our own homes, neighbourhoods, and places of work or study, choose to live with peace, and treat the people around us with justice. It's a simple but significant choice we can all make today - or right this moment.

How can you embrace a humble lifestyle today? What jealousies or selfish ambitions might you have to release? Instead of trying to change the world today, why not try to change one thing in yourself that does not fit with a "humble lifestyle"?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways to resist selfishness, jealousy and arrogance in our own hearts is to give. The act of giving forces us to think more about others than ourselves, and leads us into generosity and grace. Find every opportunity you can, today, to give of your time, your treasures or your talents.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me how to give myself in this moment, O God.

Wednesday 03 January 2018

Reading: James 4:1-10

Reflection: This is a hard passage to read. James doesn't mince his words, and he strongly challenges followers of Christ to be honest about what is in their hearts. Following on from yesterday's call to live a "humble lifestyle" James declares that we must be willing to search ourselves and confront the evil within us - our divided loyalty to God's Reign, our impure motives, our jealousy, and self-centredness. These worst parts of ourselves lead to

devastating conflicts between us and others, and keep us from experiencing the best life that God desires for us. Honest and repentant self-examination is always difficult and painful work, but there is a promise offered to those who have the courage to do it: If we humble ourselves before God, God will lift us up.

If we want to receive the abundant life that Jesus spoke about, we cannot avoid doing the internal work of acknowledging our brokenness and sinfulness, confessing our worst, humbling ourselves before God, and releasing desires that cause strife and suffering for us and others. Part of this work may also entail going to those we have hurt and making things right. If we choose not to humble ourselves in this way, we will find no real healing, and we will experience the negative impact in our relationships and our lives - which is actually much more painful. But, if we do humble ourselves, God lifts us up, which means that we find healing, life, and deeper connectedness with our best selves, with God, and with others.

Do you want to experience God's life today? Are you willing to do some tough soul-searching to get it?

Practice for Today: Humility is often marked by a readiness to admit our mistakes and change ourselves. One powerful practice that helps us to do this is confession. Today, make confession - to God and, if necessary, to others - a conscious part of your day whenever you do, say or think things that do not fit with a humble lifestyle.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Spirit of God, reveal anything in my heart that hurts you or others, and forgive me.

Thursday 04 January 2018

Reading: Proverbs 3:1-12

Reflection: Two words that seem to have lost their value for many people are "faithfulness" and "discipline". But both of these words are important for living a life of fullness, joy, peace and contribution, according to our reading today. There is much to be said for committing to God and to others - especially our loved ones - each day. Faithfulness is driven by feelings or circumstances. It is a choice to

stay true to the ones we value. But, in order to make this choice, we need the gift of discipline. Like an athlete who gets fit and strong through daily routines of practice and nutrition - even when feelings would make it easier to stay in bed a bit longer - a daily discipline of worship, of connecting with God and others, helps us to stay committed and faithful.

How can you renew your commitment to daily worship today? And how can you allow this to help you be more faithful to your family, to your friends, to your church and, most importantly, to Christ?

Practice for Today: One of the things that most easily undermines our faithfulness and discipline is despair. When we lose hope, it becomes much harder to stay on course, and much easier to go astray, following things that don't help us stay focussed. There is one sure remedy for despair, though - the practice of praise. Today, use every opportunity to praise God, even when you don't feel like it.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, God, for your love and discipline that keep me faithful to you and others.

Friday 05 January 2018

Reading: Luke 6:27-31

Reflection: The "Golden Rule" sometimes feels like the most basic of common sense - treat others the way you want to be treated. When Jesus teaches this, though, he teases out the implications, and it begins to look a little more difficult. Loving enemies, refusing to retaliate when hurt, giving without expecting anything in return - this all sounds like a lot more than just treating people how we want to be treated. It can feel like going beyond common sense goodness - and, in reality it is. Living the way Jesus describes is sacrificial and it goes against our natural inclinations for "payback", for "tit-for-tat", and for what we mistakenly call justice. But, in it lies the sacrifice, in the willingness to go beyond common sense into true Christlike goodness that we find true freedom and life.

Is this a difficult idea for you to contemplate? Do you find yourself responding "Yes, but..."? What would it take for you to really embrace this difficult teaching of Jesus today?

Practice for Today: Today's practice is simple, but it promises to shift us away from "common sense" goodness, into true sacrificial,

gracious living. Throughout today, try to pray for everyone you encounter, regardless of whether they are friend or foe, whether they deserve your kindness or not, whether you consider them good or bad. You can use your breath-prayer to help you do this.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Dear Jesus, may your grace and blessing touch [*this person**] as they have touched me.

Epiphany Saturday 06 January 2018

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection: Today, in the Church Calendar, is known as Epiphany. An epiphany is a moment of sudden revelation or insight, and the word has come to represent the moment in which God's grace and glory was revealed to the Gentiles (and by implication the entire world) through Christ. In the weeks that follow, the readings that are set for each Sunday explore the way God's glory was (and continues to be) revealed through Christ to those who encountered him.

The magi (the word is actually sorcerer, just as in Acts 8:9) are among the first witnesses to the birth of the Saviour, although they probably arrived over a year after the actual birth. Along with the shepherds, they would not have been permitted to enter the temple, and were considered, by the Law, to be cut off from God. They were foreigners and Gentiles, and they were practitioners of a spirituality (sorcery) that was forbidden in the Old Testament Scriptures. Yet, they were welcomed into Christ's home, they received insight into who this child really was, and they became worshippers who needed no temple. Right from the start of Jesus' earthly life he reveals that God's grace and welcome knows no limitations. All are welcome!

Compare, for a moment, how these excluded travellers worshipped Jesus and were welcomed into his home, with the way Herod, the Jewish King who should have rejoiced at the birth of the Messiah, sought to execute the baby. This simple comparison reminds us that it is often those who seem to be outside of God's grace who are the best reflections of it, while those who seem to be "in" are often the furthest from the values and priorities of God's Reign!

Who are those that you would prefer not to welcome today? In what ways does this story challenge you?

Practice for Today: If you have opportunities to gather with friends, family or companions, try to make the most of them, and enjoy the blessing of togetherness. But, in addition to this, try to connect in some way with someone that you wouldn't ordinarily pay attention to. Have a conversation with a stranger or have coffee with someone who is very different from you. Let their differences inspire and challenge you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Welcoming Christ, teach me to celebrate and welcome those who are different from me.

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