

Worship at Home – 19th January 2025 (2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time)
A short act of worship for use in people's homes prepared by Rachel Borgars.

Call to worship

Here we are Lord, your people, gathered in your name on this Lord's Day. Here we are Lord, stepping aside from the world 'out there' to meet as your church, today. Here we are Lord, seeking an encounter with you again, a fresh taste of grace. Here we are Lord, we have come.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit, we pray. **Amen**

Hymn – STF 608 – All praise to our redeeming Lord Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

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| 1 | All praise to our redeeming Lord,
Who joins us by his grace,
And bids us, each to each restored,
Together seek his face. | 2 | He bids us build each other up;
And, gathered into one,
To our high calling's glorious hope
We hand in hand go on. |
| 3 | The gift which he on one bestows,
We all delight to prove;
The grace through every vessel flows,
In purest streams of love. | 4 | Ev'n now we think and speak the same,
And cordially agree;
Concentred all, through Jesu's name,
In perfect harmony. |
| 5 | We all partake the joy of one,
The common peace we feel,
A peace to sensual minds unknown,
A joy unspeakable. | 6 | And if our fellowship below
In Jesus be so sweet,
What heights of rapture shall we know
When round his throne we meet! |

Opening prayers

Gracious God, you have called us to be your people,
And we come to worship you this day,
May we become aware of your Spirit here, as we worship, O God.

Loving God,
We gather today,
Stepping aside from the distractions of the outside world, to tune our hearts to love again.

You, O Lord, have blessed us richly, with your unchanging faithfulness to us and your love for all people.

Today, we give you our thanks, our praise, and our worship.

Today, we come to you to seek to connect with the great spirit-of-life that is flowing through all creation,
To be inspired, uplifted, reinvigorated, and reminded of your love for us.

Today, we turn aside from the choices of sin and selfishness, knowing that you have already forgiven us, and for that we are truly grateful.
Come, Lord Jesus.

May we be a people who take that love with us in all that we do,

This day, This week, And forevermore. **Amen**

Bible reading – Isaiah 62:1-5

The Lord Gives Zion a New Name

¹The Lord says, “For the good of Zion I will not keep silent.

For Jerusalem’s benefit I will not remain quiet.

I will not keep silent until what I will do for them
shines like the sunrise.

I will not remain quiet until they are saved
and shine like a blazing torch.

²Jerusalem, the nations will see
that I have made everything right for you.

All their kings will see your glory.

You will be called by a new name.

I myself will give it to you.

³You will be like a glorious crown in my strong hand.

You will be like a royal crown in my powerful hand.

⁴People will not call you Deserted anymore.

They will no longer name your land Empty.

Instead, you will be called One the Lord Delights In.

Your land will be named Married One.

That’s because the Lord will take delight in you.

And your land will be married.

⁵As a young man marries a young woman,

so your Builder will marry you.

As a groom is happy with his bride,

so your God will be full of joy over you.”

Bible reading – John 2:1-11

Jesus Changes Water Into Wine

¹On the third day there was a wedding. It took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

⁴“Dear woman, why are you telling me about this?” Jesus replied. “The time for me to show who I really am isn’t here yet.”

⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do what he tells you.”

⁶Six stone water jars stood nearby. The Jews used water from that kind of jar for special washings. They did that to make themselves pure and “clean.” Each jar could hold 20 to 30 gallons.

⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” So, they filled them to the top.

⁸Then he told them, “Now dip some out. Take it to the person in charge of the dinner.”

They did what he said. ⁹The person in charge tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He didn’t realize where it had come from. But the servants who had brought the water knew. Then the person in charge called the groom to one side. ¹⁰He said to him, “Everyone brings out the best wine first. They bring out the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best until now.”

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana in Galilee was the first of his signs. Jesus showed his glory by doing this sign. And his disciples believed in him.

Hymn – STF 134 – Christ, whose glory fills the skies Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

- 1 Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only light,
Sun of righteousness, arise,
Triumph o'er the shades of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near;
Day-star, in my heart appear.
- 2 Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by thee:
Joyless is the day's return,
Till thy mercy's beams I see,
Till they inward light impart,
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.
- 3 Visit then this soul of mine;
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, radiance divine;
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more thyself display,
Shining to the perfect day.

Reflections on the readings

Today has one of those catchy titles in the church calendar – the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany - reminding us that it is nearly two weeks since we celebrated the Feast of the Epiphany on 6th January, immediately after the final day of the Christmas season on the 5th.

But despite the rather dull title, and despite the flatness which sometimes seems to be all around in January after the excitement of Christmas, this season is full of sparkle and promise and so are today's readings from Isaiah and John.

Epiphany means 'shining out' and for these weeks which follow the Feast of Epiphany we are given examples of the light of Christ shining out – something we may be glad of in these dark, cold winter days and something which can re-energise us in the first few weeks of a new year. There is much here about new beginnings and starting again. In our Gospel passage we heard how Jesus transformed a wedding in a very non-Methodist way and brought joy and celebration to those who were there. We'll go to the party soon but first let's go back 600 years or so to the ministry of Isaiah, for the shining out of God begins long before the time of Jesus.

It seems likely that these final chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah were written between five and six centuries before Jesus, as Israel began to see signs of hope and restoration. They had spent long years in exile in Babylon and Assyria. But now things were changing again, and Isaiah's message is full of hope and promise.

- Isaiah prophesied that the vindication of Jerusalem would 'shine out like the dawn and her salvation like a burning torch'.
- He announced that they would be given a new name and become a crown of beauty.

- Then a very tender prophecy in v 4 ‘You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land shall be called Married’.

Some of you may have older translations of the Bible where the Hebrew words for these titles are retained as names; names, which have survived in some cultures today – Hephzibah for ‘My Delight is in her and Beulah for ‘Married’. Perhaps you know or know of women with these delightful names!

After years of shame and desolation, feeling that they had let God down and were, at best, a disappointment to God, now they were being told ‘the LORD delights in you’. The second phrase, ‘Your land shall be married’ may sound a bit odd to us but it recalls for Israel the covenant God has made with the people, like the covenant of marriage, which assures them they will be cared for, protected and honoured.

As we know from various stories in the Bible, the giving of a new name indicates a new chapter in someone’s life, a new or renewed relationship with God, almost a new birth.

What do we need to hear from Isaiah today?

- That after the challenges we experienced in 2024, this new year is a new beginning?
- That we are not a disappointment to God, but are loved and cherished?
- That God has new ideas, new direction, perhaps even a new name for us?
- That, like Jerusalem, God’s light in us might shine out in a context where sometimes our faith is dim?

It’s appropriate that the passage from Isaiah ends with imagery of marriage with the bridegroom rejoicing over the bride – that leads us very smoothly into the Gospel story from John.

We discover that Jesus and his mother are both guests at a wedding – we don’t know whose. At some point disaster occurs – at least, in a culture which holds generous hospitality in very high regard, it’s a disaster – the wine runs out. This is going to mean embarrassment and shame for the families involved and the happy day of celebration looks like turning into a day of grumbling and discontent. Until Mary, the mother of Jesus, decides that this is something Jesus can help with!

Some of us here are mothers, most of us have had mothers and so most of us will identify with the experience of being asked to do something by your mother which you feel is inappropriate. Jesus doesn’t sound thrilled at being brought in to help – ‘No mother, it’s not my time yet.’ His mother disregards his protests and tells the servants to do whatever he tells them to do. Unable to escape from the situation, Jesus tells them to fill some extremely large jars with water and then, without any song or dance or incantation or ceremony, the water becomes wine. Not just a few bottles, but more than 120 gallons. The party is rescued. The chief steward is completely amazed, not, it appears at the quantity of the wine, but at its quality. Why, he asks the bridegroom, have you kept back this superior wine until the end? I imagine the bridegroom has no idea how to answer that!

John goes on to describe this as the first of a series of ‘signs’ which Jesus performed. A sign of what?

- John suggests it was a sign of glory, the glory of God demonstrated in human form in a remarkable way.
- John also tells us that as a result of these signs, the disciples believed in him, so it was a sign that Jesus was worth following, worth believing in.
- Was it also a sign that whatever God does is of the highest quality imaginable? That God is not content with mediocrity or expediency, but always demonstrates capacious grace, abundant joy, overflowing life?

But it was done without fanfares or announcements – I imagine that most of the guests went home not even knowing where the wine had come from. For those who knew what was going on, however, this was a true Epiphany, a shining out of the light of Christ in a way which brought sparkle and life to a situation which was potentially flat and shameful. For them it was a sign of God's glory breaking out in a man they knew.

Could that happen today for us? Not the sudden transformation of gallons of water into wine, but the shining out of God's glory to a world which knows more about shame and dullness? Could we be part of that?

On this second Sunday after Epiphany, let's be open to the light of God shining into us and shining out from us wherever we may go this week. Thanks be to God. **Amen**

Prayers for the world, others and ourselves

God of new life, new hope, new beginnings, new opportunities, we bring our prayers to you for all who are in need of your transforming power:

We pray for all who feel flat, tired, anxious or depressed, perhaps bringing ourselves to God now as we also name others in our hearts...

We pray for all who are ill or in pain, at home or in hospital and for those who care for them. Some are known to us; all are known to you...

We remember those we know who we love but see no longer, those who have shone your light into our lives and we pray for all who grieve at this time...

We pray for our communities, bringing before you the particular needs of which we are aware, praying for our schools, our local councillors, our charities...

We pray for the wider society of the British Isles, praying for the governments, and bringing before you the many needs and injustices throughout society...

We pray for the world, naming in our hearts those countries experiencing war, famine, flood, drought, oppression, mismanagement, giving thanks for the fragile ceasefire in the Middle East and praying for all citizens of the United States as their new President is sworn in this week...

We pray for the local churches and for the church worldwide, asking for new hope, new courage, new energy, new wisdom...

We pray for ourselves, knowing that we need to be filled with your light and your love, to equip us for whatever the week ahead will bring... **Amen**

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Hymn – STF 610 – Best of all is God is with us Andrew E Pratt (born 1948)

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| 1 | Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail. | 2 | Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget. |
| 3 | Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed. | 4 | Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, but death is gain'. |
| | 5 | | Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights. |

Blessing

May we go with the courage of Christ in our hearts.
May we go with the fierce energy of the Spirit in our bodies.
May we go with the God of love streaming through us and out into the world.
So let us go in peace and serve the Lord. **Amen**

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