

St Paul's Anglican Church Cooma 31 Dec 2023

Introduction

Hymn - From all who dwell below the skies

From all who dwell below the skies
let the Creator's praise arise! Hallelujah!
let the Redeemer's name be sung
through every land, by every tongue! Hallelujah!

Eternal are your mercies, Lord,
eternal truth attends your word; Hallelujah!
your praise shall sound from shore to shore
till suns shall rise and set no more. Hallelujah!

Greeting

Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.

And also with you.

Sentence for the Day

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for
revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel, Luke 2:30-32

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God,

**to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love
you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The Two Great Commandments

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and
with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. 'And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour
as yourself.

Lord have mercy on us, and incline our hearts to keep this law

Prayer of the Day

Saving God, Whose son Jesus was presented at the temple and was acclaimed the glory of Israel and the
light of the nations: grant that in him we may be presented to you and in the world reflect His glory, who
lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever

Amen.

The Ministry of the Word

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of
salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and
as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD
will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. 2 The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. 3 You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 148

1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights above.
2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.
4 Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.
5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for at his command they were created,
6 and he established them for ever and ever—he issued a decree that will never pass away.
7 Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,
9 you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,
10 wild animals and all cattle small creatures and flying birds,
11 kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth,
12 young men and women, old men and children.
13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
14 And he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD.

Galatians 4:4-7

4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Luke 2:21-40

Glory to You, Lord Jesus Christ

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.
22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."
25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." 33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.
34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." 36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years

after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the gospel of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Sermon

Musical Item

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Response: Gracious God, in your mercy **Receive our prayers**

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.

But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy.

Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The Confession

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table
Let us therefore draw near in full assurance of faith, and confess our sins to the God of grace.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge,

we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do:

**we have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;
we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.
Father, forgive us.
Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Almighty God,
who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Greeting of the Peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**
The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn - Child in the Manger

**Child in the manger, infant of Mary;
outcast and stranger, Lord of all!
Child who inherits all our transgressions,
all our demerits on him fall**

**Once the most holy child of salvation
gentle and lowly lived below;
now, as our glorious, mighty Redeemer,
see him victorious over each foe.**

**Prophets foretold him, infant of wonder;
angels behold him on his throne;
worthy our Saviour of all their praises;
happy for ever are his own.**

Offering Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have gifts to share.
Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.
Blessed be God for ever.

The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Loving God, we thank you for this world of wonder and delight. You have given it to us to care for, so that all your creatures may enjoy its bounty.
Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that when we turned away from you, you sent Jesus to live and work as one of us, and bring us back to you. He showed us how to love you and set us free to love and serve one another.
Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that on the cross Jesus took away our sin, all that keeps us from each other and from you. He frees us from hate and fear, from all that destroys love and trust.
Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

And so with everyone who believes in you, with all the saints and angels, we rejoice and praise you, saying:
**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

And now we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine; may we who receive them, as Jesus said, share his body and his blood. On the night he was betrayed, he took bread and gave you thanks. He broke the bread and gave it to his friends, and said,

'Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper he took the cup and gave you thanks. He shared the cup with them and said,
'This is my blood poured out so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

You have gathered us together to feed on Christ and to remember all he has done for us.

Fill us with your Spirit that we may follow Jesus in all we do and say, working for justice and bringing your peace to this world that you have made.

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord.

We who are many are one body, **for we all share in the one bread.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

After Communion

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us in this hope that we have grasped: so we and all your people will be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name. **Amen**

Notices

Hymn - Glory to God on High

Glory to God on high!

Let heaven and earth reply,

'Praise, praise his name!'

Angels his love adore

who all our sorrows bore,

and saints cry evermore,

'Worthy the Lamb!'

All those around the throne

cheerfully join in one,

praising his name;

We, who have felt his blood

sealing our peace with God,

sound his dear fame abroad,

'Worthy the Lamb!'

**Join, all the ransomed race,
our Lord and God to bless:
praise, praise his name;
in him we will rejoice,
making a cheerful noise,
shouting with heart and voice,
'Worthy the Lamb!'**

**Though we must change our place,
yet we shall never cease
praising his name;
to him we'll tribute bring,
hail him our gracious King,
and without ceasing sing,
'Worthy the Lamb!'**

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Sermon

Introduction - Birth Order

There has been a lot of study into the significance of birth order, the impact of being the oldest, youngest or a middle child in the family. In my case I am the third child of four, so I'm a middle child, but since there was about a big gap between me and my younger brother, I'm also kind of a youngest child.

It has been said that first children are glass, middle children are stainless steel, and last children are rubber, this is because parents generally learn progressively how robust babies and children really are, and they are progressively less concerned about the sorts of danger their children get themselves into. I'm not quite sure what this says about me as a middle/youngest child, but it probably says something about how we raised our children.

Put up your hand if you are a youngest child in your family. According to the Internet, you tend to be, Fun-loving, Uncomplicated, Manipulative, Outgoing, Attention-seeking and Self-centered. Are you?

Middle child You're supposed to be People-pleasers, Somewhat rebellious, Thrives on friendships, Has a large social circle, and Peacemaker

Eldest child, or first born Reliable, Conscientious, Structured, Cautious, Controlling and Achievers. Are you?

The Bible, and the Old Testament in particular, puts a lot of emphasis on the first born, although it's not always that simple. Abraham's first born was Ishmael, but he didn't count as he was born of Abraham's concubine, not his wife, so Isaac was the first born.

Isaac and his Wife Rebekah's first children were twins, Esau and Jacob. Esau came out first, even though only by a few minutes, so he was the first born, but later he sold that birthright to Jacob for some lentil stew. That, with a bit of trickery on Jacob's part, meant that he also received the blessing due to the first born.

The most significant narrative regarding first borns came at the time of Moses and the ten plagues of Egypt. You may recall that the final plague that finally forced Pharaoh to relent and let the Israelites go, was that every firstborn son in Egypt died, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. From the exodus on, all of God's people were to (Exodus 13:2 NIV) consecrate to God every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to God, whether human or animal, and they were to redeem each of my firstborn sons.' 16 And it will be like a sign on their hands and a symbol on their foreheads that the LORD brought them out of Egypt with his mighty hand."

When God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt by striking down every Egyptian firstborn, he claimed for himself every firstborn male of Israel, human or animal. In effect, the blood of the Egyptian firstborns saved God's people.

Redeeming Firstborns

Obviously Jesus was Mary's firstborn, and this is why it was so important that Mary and Joseph fulfilled all the requirements of the law regarding firstborns by redeeming Jesus, by offering the sacrifice of two doves or two young pigeons as God commanded. The sacrifice of two birds was the redemption sacrifice required for Jesus, their first born, and they were very careful to keep this requirement.

Circumcising Babies

Mary and Joseph also had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day as commanded by God. This was an indelible sign of God's covenant with Abraham, where he promised Abraham in Gen 17 You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God. " Genesis 17:4-8

It is interesting that circumcision also gets a mention when Moses is called by God to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt in Exodus 5. Despite God's command, Moses had not had his sons circumcised, which had angered God. Fortunately, his wife Zipporah arranged it very promptly, which allowed Moses to fulfill God's mission to rescue the Israelites. These two birth rites for Jesus were both associated with the Israelite being rescued, and is significant for how we understand them, as we will get to shortly.

Purification Rites

You may also have noticed that Mary completed all the purification rites required by the law of Moses, which culminated with Mary presenting the baby Jesus at the temple and offering the redemption sacrifice..

This is a reference to Leviticus 12, which says A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. Leviticus 12:2-4

Again we see that Jesus is completely fulfilling the law, and in particular those aspects of the law that deal with ritual cleanliness, or things that stand in the way of man relating to God. In Jewish law there are many things that can make someone unclean, and ineligible to enter God's presence in the temple. Luke is at pains to assure us that none of these applied to Jesus, he fulfilled all the purification requirements, so nothing could stand between his relationship with Yahweh his Father.

So what do we learn of Jesus from these rituals - redemption sacrifices, circumcision and purification rites?

We should look to two witnesses of Jesus' presentation at the temple for this, Simeon and Anna.

Simeon was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, a reference Isaiah 52:9 which prophesies God comforting Israel when he redeems them. The Holy Spirit had personally promised Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's chosen Messiah, and led him to the temple on that specific day. Simeon took Jesus in his arms, and praised God with what is sometimes called the *nunc dimittis* - or dismissal. Just to be different, reading from the HJV:

²⁹ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

³⁰ For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

³¹ Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

³² A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. Luke 2:29-32

The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he was holding the comfort, the salvation of Israel, God's chosen Messiah in his very arms. He was holding the light to the gentiles and the glory of Israel. Not only this, but Simeon also knew something of what this meant for Jesus and Mary, telling Mary that Jesus would cause many in Israel to fall and rise, and that Jesus would be a sign that would be spoken against, ³⁵ revealing the very thoughts of many hearts, piercing Mary's own soul as well. Luke 2:34-35

The other witness was Anna, a spring chicken of 84 (which was very old in those days), who had been widowed for most of her life, virtually living in the temple. She came up to them at that very moment, gave thanks to God. Like Simeon, she saw that Jesus was the redemption of Israel as prophesied by Isaiah, and like the shepherds last week, spoke about the child to all who would listen Luke 2:38

Simeon and Anna saw Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies for the consolation and redemption of Israel. They knew his parents had been fastidious to scrupulously obey the Bible's commandments for his ritual cleanliness, and they understood the signs that pointed to him identifying with God's salvation of Israel (circumcision), God's first born (redeemed with a sacrifice of 2 doves or young pigeons), and compliance with the ritual cleanliness laws, so that nothing stood between Jesus and God.

Despite the hints that Simeon had, even they probably did not know how Jesus, the babe in arms before them, but also the firstborn of God, Messiah of the Lord would be persecuted, suffer and die and ignominious criminal's death to achieve the consolation of Israel that the Holy Spirit had revealed to them, or even the full extent of that consolation, spreading out to bless the entire world as God had promised Abraham, but by the Holy Spirit they knew that Jesus was this Messiah, no matter how God would work it out.

Like Simeon and Anna, we only have to see the signs and hear the revelation of the Holy Spirit to be assured that Jesus is the Messiah, our salvation. With the benefit of the gospel writers, we know how Jesus did in fact suffer and die in our place for our salvation, and how the apostle Paul, the writer of the letter to the Galatians could say:

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law (completely under the law), the firstborn from among the dead ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

So we are God's sons, and God has sent the Spirit of his Son, his firstborn, into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So we are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since we are his children, God has made each one of us an heir, with the rights of a firstborn, no matter how many Christian brothers and sisters are redeemed before and after us.

Let us praise God as Simeon did:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For our eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." Luke 2:29-32

Amen