

worship@home resources for 13 December

CALL TO WORSHIP

Our hearts proclaim your greatness, O God.

And our spirits rejoice in you.

We will praise you as long as we live.

We will sing praises to you our whole lives long.

We will not trust in the powerful of this world,
but will trust in you – Creator of heaven and earth,
the One who gives food to the hungry,
the One who enacts justice for the oppressed.

Our souls proclaim your greatness, O God
as we worship you in this place,
and as we light the Advent candles of hope, peace, and joy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge that we live and worship on lands that were taken from the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulin nation, the traditional the custodians of these lands.

We pay respects to their Elders, past, present and those emerging, and commit ourselves afresh to walk with all the First Peoples of this land in their search for justice.

HYMN TiS 161 Tell out my soul

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;

tender to me the promise of his word;

in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!

Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;

his mercy sure, from age to age to same;

his holy name--the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by,

proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,

the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!

Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

to children's children and for evermore!



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YouTube version here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3E7QWLyDWe8>

PRAYER

God of hope and joy,
We come this day to praise your name
and to be encouraged as your people.

**As Christmas draws closer, we want to take some time
to reflect on how the world has changed because Jesus was born.**

As we remember with joy what you have done for us
we also pause to think what you ask of us.

**Draw near to us this morning through your Holy Spirit
to open our hearts and minds afresh to your word moving among and within us.**

God of justice and mercy,
When our spirits despair and we forget that we are blessed

Forgive us, O God

When we ignore the mighty things you have done or doubt your mercy

Forgive us, O God

When we are proud in the thoughts of our hearts
and when our wealth causes others to go hungry

Forgive us, O God

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news: God forgives us, makes us new and restores us to life.

Show us we might bring this message of hope and joy to our broken world. Amen.

BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 61:1-3, 8-11 (NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,

because the Lord has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,

to proclaim freedom for the captives

and release from darkness for the prisoners,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

and the day of vengeance of our God,

to comfort all who mourn,

and provide for those who grieve in Zion –

to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,

the oil of joy instead of mourning,

and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,

a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour. ...

For I, the Lord, love justice;

I hate robbery and wrongdoing.

In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the Lord has blessed.
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.
For as the soil makes the young plant come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

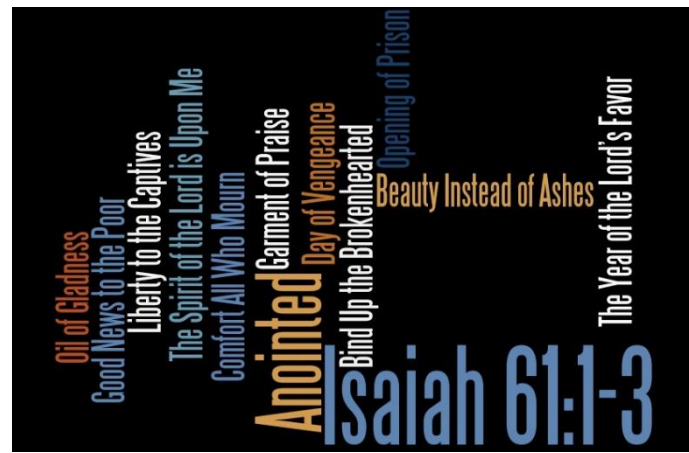
Luke 1:46b-55

Mary said:

‘My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

REFLECTION

After the year of 2020 that we've all experienced, who would like some good news, divine favour, comfort and joy? These are some of the blessings promised in the reading from Isaiah 61: the poor will receive good news, the broken-hearted and grieving will be comforted and God's people will be restored. So however bleak the situation facing God's people on their return from exile in Babylon, God promises great blessing and hope for the future.



Similar claims are made in Mary's song called the *Magnificat* (so-called because this is the opening word of the song in its Latin translation) ... God has done great things for those who fear him (like Mary), the lowly have been lifted up, the hungry fed. Blessings abound! These blessings are so sure that they are described in the past tense as having already been fulfilled.

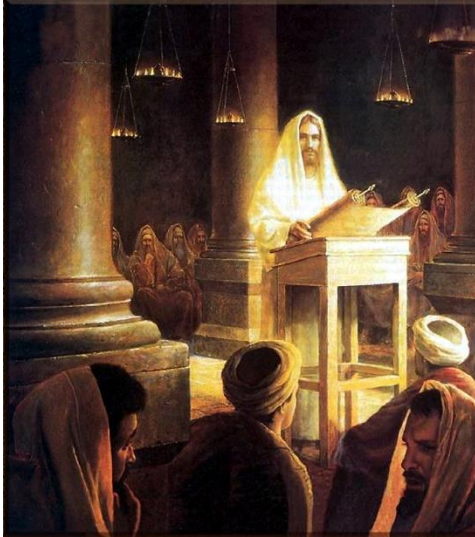
There's just one problem. Nobody seems to have told the leaders and rulers of the nations about these new arrangements. They still rule with power through military might and oppression, they still hoard most of the wealth, and they're not about to give up these privileges, whether we're speaking of the Romans in the time of Mary, the Persians in the time of Isaiah, or the wealthy elite in many countries of the world today. The vision we are offered in Isaiah and in Mary's song doesn't seem to match our world's lived reality.

Why, for instance, has there been such a mad scramble to develop a vaccine for Covid19? Partly it's because people are suffering and dying in large numbers, but also because it's affecting people in *wealthy* countries and drug manufacturers know there are billions of dollars of profit to be made if they can be first to develop a safe vaccine. Meanwhile, where is the money and the urgency to develop vaccines for diseases that kill a similar number of people each year to Covid 19 ... for TB and malaria and HIV/AIDS? The key difference is who is being infected by each of these deadly diseases.

This year we have all struggled through a challenging year where our freedoms and movements were restricted and we were confined to our homes, unable to see our loved ones, needing to work or study or worship from home. But one often unstated truth is that most of us have comfortable homes to withdraw to, plenty of food to eat and access to the TV or Netflix to keep us entertained. It's been a challenging year but manageable for most of us. So which side of God's justice do we fall on? Are we among the wealthy and powerful? Perhaps. How loudly have we been advocating for just treatment of foreign students, of casual workers and of asylum seekers still imprisoned after 7 or 10 years?

Hence the flip side of our readings today is the call for justice and for God's vengeance: for the powerful to be thrown down off their thrones, for the rich to learn what it is like to be hungry, for those who are proud and self-sufficient to learn to rely on others and on God. So much in the world continues to be unfair, unjust and cruel. What's to be done?

We get some hints when Jesus reads the Isaiah 61 passage in the synagogue at Nazareth, as



recounted in Luke 4:16-21. First, Jesus claims that this prophecy is fulfilled in his person and in his ministry. He is the anointed figure who will preach good news to the poor, release the oppressed and proclaim the year of the God's favour. He will begin the task of turning the world right side up.

Yet Jesus and his life-giving message will not be acceptable to those who feel threatened by its implications. It's okay to be blessed but not okay when outsiders and those on the margins are also blessed. It's not okay for the Messiah to omit the part about God's vengeance against enemies, which shows that our sense of justice may not match that of Jesus.

Jesus comes to bring God's comfort and joy and favour. He also brings a renewed sense of God's justice that threatens some people and upsets the status quo. Will we accept both the blessing and the call to seek justice? What does this look like in a world beset with Covid19 – along with many other injustices? What is our role as followers of Jesus?

HYMN TiS 287 No wind at the window

No wind at the window, no knock on the door;
no light from the lampstand, no foot on the floor;
no dream born of tiredness, no ghost raised by fear;
just an angel and a woman and a voice in her ear.

O Mary, O Mary, don't hide from my face,
be glad that you're favoured and filled with God's grace.
The time for redeeming the world has begun;
and you are requested to mother God's son.

This child must be born that the kingdom might come;
salvation for many, destruction for some;
both end and beginning, both message and sign;
both victor and victim, both yours and divine.

No payment was promised, no promises made;
no wedding was dated, no blue print displayed.
Yet Mary, consenting to what none could guess,
replied with conviction, "Tell God I say Yes."

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YouTube version here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lcuz2Hf5OZ4>

NOTICES

JOYS AND CONCERNS

CHRISTMAS BOWL – A STORY FROM SRI LANKA

Joy is that soaring feeling in your soul when Christ's gift first enters your life. But joy is hard to find when civil war forces you from your homeland for decades and then a pandemic threatens your resettlement. It's been 30 years since Rashan and his wife Pamodi fled conflict in Sri Lanka with their eight-year-old daughter. They'll never forget their terrifying boat journey to India ... The family found safety in India, but life was difficult. They spent 27 years in a refugee camp surviving on food rations. They longed to return home.

After peace returned, Rashan and Pamodi travelled back to Sri Lanka to reclaim their family land. But they were starting all over again – with no job, no money and nothing to prove their rights to their land. COVID-19 has made that task even harder. A gift to the Christmas Bowl will make it possible for Act for Peace's partner, the Organisation for Eelam Refugees' Rehabilitation (OfERR) to support returned Sri Lankan refugees at this difficult time.

With help from OfERR, Rashan and Pamodi were able to take back their land and build a temporary home to live in. OfERR also helped them to install a bore well and water pump, so they could grow and sell food. Today, their thriving farm even provides work to other families. After decades of fear, hardship and uncertainty, Rashan and Pamodi have finally found joy again. They are reconnecting with long-lost relatives, and hope their daughter and her husband and children will join them soon from India.

This Christmas, please help returned Sri Lankan refugees overcome their challenges and help them build a safe, happy future.



PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord our God,
you have revealed yourself as one
who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among all people.
In a world that turns its face away from injustice,
you cast your eyes on the sick, the poor, the hungry and the oppressed.
Open our eyes to the needs around us including those of our indigenous brothers and sisters
and help us to follow you,
to bring good news to the poor,
both through our actions and also by speaking up for those who have no voice.

Be present with your church, Lord, in this place
as we respond to your call.

Fill us with compassion for the plight of asylum seekers, refugees, new immigrants,
foreign students and the forgotten ones living amongst us.

Show us how we can reach out with your love in practical ways
and give us courage to block the paths of those who exploit the poor.

Compassionate God,

We want our worship to be more than just pious words.

We pray for those known to us whose needs you have placed on our hearts
and we lift them before you now ...

We also pray that you would free our hearts and our hands and our feet
that we might share our bread with the hungry,
and learn to truly love our neighbour as ourselves.

Almighty God,

may your justice roll down like waters
and your righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Lead our footsteps to stand with the poor,
that we might stand with you.

We pray now in the words Jesus taught his followers, saying **Our Father in heaven ...**

BENEDICTION

Know that the time of the Lord's favour is now!

So go out from this place into the world
carrying the good news about justice for the poor
and healing for the afflicted.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

SENDING SONG TiS 276 There's a light upon the mountains

There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;
weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long,
but his triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air,
and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer;
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of his own.

He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way,
he is calling for his angels to build up the gates of day;
but his angels here are human, not the shining hosts above;
for the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark, we hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell –
the great triumph song of Jesus, of our King Immanuel;
Zion, go you forth to meet him, and my soul, be swift to bring
all your finest and your dearest for the triumph of our King!

Henry Burton 1840-1930 *alt.* words and music by permission Methodist Publishing House UK.

For YouTube version see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwal>