

## **Sunday 10th January 2021**

### **The Moderator's Service**

Worship curated by The Moderator of the General Assembly with contributions from:

Moderator's Chaplain, Gregor McIntyre

Leader of the Iona Community, Ruth Harvey

Writer and Poet, Retired Minister, Tom Gordon

Banchory West Youth Group member,

Music from New Scottish Hymns, Alan Campbell and Ashton Lane

### **Call to Worship**

Leader: God of light, light of light true God of true God

ALL: We bless You

Leader: God of new beginnings, hope of hope, as we reach for this new year

ALL: We bless You

Leader: God of joy, delight of delight, as we give thanks for all that is good

ALL: We bless You

### **Opening Praise**

Infant holy, infant lowly,  
for his bed a cattle stall;  
oxen lowing, little knowing  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
Swift are winging angels singing,  
nowells ringing, tidings bringing;  
Christ the babe is Lord of all;  
Christ the babe is Lord of all!

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping  
vigil till the morning new;  
saw the glory, heard the story –  
tidings of a gospel true.  
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,  
praises voicing, greet the morrow:  
Christ the babe was born for you;  
Christ the babe was born for you!

High above us, God who loves us  
Sends His son to save us all  
Stature growing, wisdom knowing  
Full obedience to his call  
Born in weakness, wondrous mystery

God eternal enters history  
Christ the babe is Lord of all!  
Christ the babe is Lord of all!

## **Welcome from the Moderator**

Hi everybody. These have been the most trying times; not least over Christmas and into the new year. And so as Moderator, I have simply sought to assist and support ministers and congregations - all those who are responsible for leading worship - by providing some material that will allow others to take a break; those who have been hard at it throughout.

So welcome to this mornings worship. I know we are now well into January but we are travelling forwards in the light that the Christ-child sheds. So some of our worship today will still have that Christmassy feel to it! Is that such a bad thing? Let's continue to rejoice in the coming of Jesus.

Welcome to worship.

## **Prayer**

Here we express our gratitude to God: for life, for goodness in our communities, in our world, in all of creation – acknowledging our responsibilities and stewardship role.

Lord of Hope  
we give You thanks for a new day.  
We arise today to a horizon guiding our eye beyond the everyday;  
to a dawn gently lighting up the wonders of Your creation;  
to a whispered dew rooting us firmly to this precious earth.  
For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope  
we give You thanks for a new year.  
We arise today  
to the knowledge that Your Son, our Lord, goes before us;  
to the hope that through His presence all people will be transformed;  
to the promise of salvation for all.  
For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope  
we give You thanks for a new start.  
We arise today  
turning our backs on the ways of judgement and criticism;  
sloughing off narrow-minded assumptions;

reaching out to enemy and friend with generous compassionate hearts.

For the promise of a new start, a new year, a new day, for these gifts and for so much more we thank You. Amen

### **Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:1-5**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

### **Reflection on ‘Let there be light’**

When my first child, Mairi, was a few months old, as a “modern father” I learned how to share the bathing, burping, feeding and dressing for the baby. Best of all, I became a dab-hand at nappy-changing.

These were the days of “terry nappies”, of course – we didn’t use disposable ones then. One evening, following well-practiced steps, I was changing Mairi’s nappy on the bed in the spare room. She was gurgling, gooing and grinning as babies do, and, with the jerky, uncoordinated actions of a child, was moving her hands in front of her face. I thought it was random at first, the spasmodic twitching of limbs we’ve all seen with babies. But then I realised there was a pattern to it. There was a light in the centre of the room, and this wee baby was recognising the light above her. She was finding out, for the first time, what was shining up there, and, if she moved her hands across it, she could make the light come and go. Right in front of my eyes, a child was learning to recognise the light.

The 19th century Scottish minister, Horatius Bonar, was a prolific writer of poetry and hymns. He, too, knew a light above him, and in a profoundly spiritual form. Perhaps with his bible open at the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, he wrote these words:

Light of the world! forever, ever shining,  
There is no change in Thee;  
True light of life, all joy and health enshrining,  
Thou canst not fade nor flee.

“Let there be light”, God said. Bonar had appreciated that light, forever, ever shining. He had found a light that would not change, a true light of life that

would bring him joy and fullness. Horatius Bonar had recognised the light above him. To you and me, different people in changed circumstances, but with the same purpose, God says again, “Let there be light”. There it is! It’s still shining. My light will not change.

So today, in our jerky, uncoordinated way, let’s stretch out our hands and look up at it again. And with the wondrous discovery of a little child – and a man of faith – give thanks for our Light that will not fade nor flee.

## **Praise**

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.  
There is no shadow of turning with thee.  
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not.  
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

*Great is thy faithfulness!*  
*Great is thy faithfulness!*  
*Morning by morning new mercies I see.*  
*All I have needed thy hand hath provided.*  
*Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow;  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! [Refrain]

## **New Testament Reading: Mark 1:4-11 (The Message version)**

John the Baptist appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptised by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.

As he preached he said, “The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptising you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out.”

At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God's Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

## **The Message**

When I was completing my training and preparation for ministry, I felt absolutely open to where God would have me serve. And so I well remember a prayer that went something like this: 'Lord, I'll go anywhere you would have me go and I'll serve anywhere you would have me serve. As long as it's in Glasgow!'

Well I was from Glasgow and it seemed natural enough to me that I would minister there. But we all come to learn at one time or another that when it comes to offering ourselves in service to the Almighty, we don't get to put down conditions. Rather, if we are going to say 'I am ready to serve,' we leave the rest to God.

Maybe I had to learn that lesson or maybe God has a wry sense of humour! Either way, I found myself serving in a very different place, called to the East coast of Scotland and to the lovely county of Angus and to the town of Arbroath. Not even nearly Glasgow!

Despite the surprise, we've never been disappointed about coming to the East coast. Angus really does have everything; stunning coastline, beautiful mountains and glens and lovely towns and villages. And of course for us Arbroath has been at the heart of that.

You know, when the sun is shining Arbroath really is as nice as anywhere. The old harbour has been turned into a marina and it's a lovely place to spend some time. I have to say before coming here I really didn't know much about Arbroath. I knew about the Abbey and, yes, that the football team has the world record highest score, 36-0, and of course I knew about the famous smokie - the Arbroath Smokie!

But most of all it's the folk we've come to love; not least the folks of the fishing community. Of course there's not so much fishing going on here nowadays but living by the sea, you really can't escape the history and tradition.

And I think the interesting thing is this; in getting to know the fishing folk here, it has helped me to better understand those first disciples who were, of course, fisherman themselves on the Sea of Galilee. In Mark's Gospel we hear of their calling; that Jesus came to them - Simon, Andrew, James and

John - and asked them to leave their nets and to follow him that they might become fishers of people. And doesn't that remain our calling - his followers today, to speak of Jesus and his kingdom, to be fishers for people, and to reach out with that net of Gods love?

I wonder if any of you have seen the new Disney Pixar animation, Soul? The action focuses on one particular character, known simply as 22. 22 has lost all sense of passion for life; no spark and no purpose. I wonder if there is a sense in which the church might have lost something of its sense of purpose? Certainly those first disciples, those fisherman, new absolutely that they were there to make known the name of Jesus. That was their passion, their purpose.

But even before those first disciples, there was one whose very existence was defined by that purpose of making Jesus known. John the Baptist, of whom we read this morning, established himself by the River Jordan and there, he told people to prepare themselves, by a baptism of repentance to ready themselves for the One who was to come. And of that One, John said this: 'the One who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy even to stoop down and untie the thongs of his sandals.' And further, as we find it in the Gospel according to Saint John, John the Baptist declares; 'I must decrease, he must increase.'

John knew that his purpose was to point to Christ. Of course a lesser person might have struggled with that. The evidence makes clear that John had become very popular. Many people came to him from far and wide and became his followers.

And yet he pointed them to Jesus.

Friends, this account of the Ministry of John the Baptist - pointing people to Jesus - is so right for us now. And the same goes for the account of those first disciples, those fisherman, those first followers of Jesus. Here at the start of a new year, might it be that we can recommit ourselves to this whole business of pointing towards Jesus, of sharing the love of Jesus, and of encouraging others to become his followers?

You see it's not about us! Always it's about Jesus. If the church becomes so concerned with its own survival, with its own life, that it loses sight of that business of pointing to Jesus then it loses the right to be called 'church' at all. We exist to point towards Jesus. Just as John the Baptist so long ago. Let it be true of us in this new year and in all that will follow. We point to Jesus.

Amen.

## **Closing Praise**

Oh, come, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant!  
Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold him,  
Born the King of angels;

*Oh, come, let us adore him;  
Oh, come, let us adore him;  
Oh, come, let us adore him,  
Christ, the Lord.*

Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation;  
— Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!  
Glory to God,  
Glory in the highest;

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,  
Born this happy morning;  
— Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n.  
Son of the Father,  
Now in flesh appearing;

## **Closing and Benediction**

And now, go in peace and may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you, and remain with you, now and forever more.

Amen.