twelvebaskets



CHRISTMAS 1B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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First Sunday After Christmas - Year B
27th December 2026

Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

136 STF – Morning has broken like the first morning OR

190 STF – Angels, from the realms of glory

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

544 STF – As the deer pants for the water OR

208 STF – Let earth and heaven combine

Readings: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

Hymn:

228 STF – Hail to the Lord's anointed OR

232 STF – Through long years of watchful waiting

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

229 STF – Mary and Joseph came to the Temple OR

219 STF – We see the eyes of Mary shine

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus OR

202 STF – Hark! The herald angels sing

Blessing

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Call to worship

The Christ has come!
The light shines in the darkness!
The hope of the people is here, in our midst.

Come, O come Emmanuel, we pray,

Amen.[1]

Hymn:
136 STF – Morning has broken like the first morning OR
190 STF – Angels, from the realms of glory

Opening Prayers

Divine Incarnate One, we meet with you as individual snowflakes falling into a fresh blanket of snow: unique beings invited into the softness and wonder of something so much bigger than ourselves. May we notice your presence in this Christmas season, O God.

We thank you for holding us when the world feels too much for us and for those around us.

Loving God, Accepting One, we meet with and before you as fresh pieces of paper waiting for an author's first pen-stroke: full of potential and eager to share in the story that will unfold within us.

We are sorry for when we don't always write the healthiest narratives for ourselves and for those around us.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us through each chapter of our own personal stories, and accepting us just as we are

Creator, Creative One, we meet with you today on the cusp of a new year, as fresh lumps of clay waiting for a potter's first touch: open and eager for what we will be moulded into and awaiting the reveal of how we might fit together to make a whole.

Your forgiveness and grace when we find unexpected cracks within ourselves encourages us to keep moulding, building and giving our best despite what has come before.

Inspiring One, we meet with and before you as first rays of the rising sun peering over the horizon of a new day: full of warmth and anticipation for how our light might merge together to create warmth and hope. Thank you for always bringing the dawn after the night and reminding us that we are loved, just as we are.

Amen.[2]

We say together the Lord's Prayer

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[1] Call to worship written by Tim Baker

[2] Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

All Age Talk

Simeon had been waiting a very, very, very, very long time for God's Messiah to come. He was quite old by the time he eventually met Jesus when Joseph and Mary brought him to the temple. They had brought Jesus there to present him to God and give their thanks for his new life. It was a ritual that many parents did at that time. It must have been an astonishing moment for Simeon to witness them walking in and to finally see the child that the Holy Spirit had told him to expect. I wonder if Simeon had ever doubted he would live to see this happen or did he have confidence that God would keep his promise?

There is a painting by the artist Rembrandt that captures this scene it's called Simeon's Song of Praise *(display on a screen or print out copies for people to look at, find the painting here: https://www.artway.eu/posts/rembrandt-simeons-song-of-praise).*

Spend a few moments looking at the painting, who can you see in it? What do you think is happening? How might Simeon be feeling at this special moment? Give people time to wonder together about what they notice in the painting and take some reflections from them afterwards.

Something that seems very striking is the bold beam of light that shines down right in the centre of the painting, it's like a spotlight and it falls upon Mary and Simeon who is holding the baby Jesus. The expression on Simeon's face is one of joy and amazement. He is all too aware of what an extraordinary moment this is. He praises God because he knows that Jesus came to be a light for all of us, a light that would bring us freedom, a light that would save and rescue us. As we continue to celebrate Christ's birth let's hold onto to that truth. God is with us: praise God!

Amen.[3]

Hymn:
544 STF – As the deer pants for the water OR
208 STF – Let earth and heaven combine

Readings: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

Hymn:
228 STF – Hail to the Lord's anointed OR
232 STF – Through long years of watchful waiting

Reflections on the readings

Happy Christmas! Today is the third day of the Christmas season (still 9 to go) and we are very much in a season of celebration: I wonder if your three French hens have arrived yet?

In this season of Christmas there is much to celebrate, as we rejoice in the amazing event of the Incarnation – God becoming flesh, like us, for us! The bible readings chosen for

[3] All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

today point to a season of celebration and praise – although one of the readings also takes note that life can involve hurt and pain as well. That can be particularly hard at Christmas. So, in these readings we see something of the two words which Mark and Caroline, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, are bringing to our attention this year: joy and sorrow. Let's dig deeper… We're going to end up in the beautiful story of Anna and Simeon, from Luke chapter two, but before we get there, a little background from the Hebrew scriptures.

The psalm is probably the most ancient of the readings we look at today. It is generally thought that David lived at around 1000BC, and whilst he probably didn't write all the psalms himself, that gives us a rough date for when these songs began to be used and recorded. And songs is probably what they were – today's, psalm 148, is a particularly joyful number, which uses the word 'praise' thirteen times! Every part of creation is called upon to praise the LORD… from the angels in heaven and the sun, moon and stars of the sky, down through every kind of weather (we may like to consider in what ways hail can be said to praise God, if we experience that this winter) then down again through the mountains and trees to animals, birds and sea monsters in the ocean. Nothing is exempted from praise – including humankind – '*kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth, young men and women alike, old and young together!*' That's pretty inclusive! We are included – this is about us too.

Sometimes we might be fine about that – perhaps things are good; the Christmas dinner went without catastrophe or argument, the presents we gave seem to have been acceptable and the Christmas lights didn't fuse on Christmas Eve… it's been a good year, Praise the Lord!

But we know really that it's not always like that; and even if it were, praising God is about a bit more than food, gifts and decorations. The last two verses of the psalm give us a bit more substance about praising God:

- Firstly, God is the only one who is worthy to be exalted, lifted up, because God's glory is beyond anything in earth or heaven. We might gasp in wonder at a spectacular Christmas tree or the lights in central London, Edinburgh or Cardiff, but God's glory is far, far, above that. Praise the Lord!
- Secondly, in a rather quaint phrase, God has '*raised up a horn for his people*' – that probably links to the way an animal uses its horn as a defence, so it's all about God being our champion, our defender, the one who always has our back – Praise the Lord!
- Thirdly, we can say that we are amongst God's faithful people who are 'close to him' – what a lovely image and a solid foundation for rejoicing – Praise the Lord!

In the passage from the final chapters of Isaiah we are given another beautiful image of rejoicing with plenty of over-the-top glitzy, Christmassy imagery – the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness, garlands, jewels, new shoots in nature… It had been a hard time for the nation of Israel in exile, but now they are seeing God's vindication and salvation and have hopes of being restored to being a '*crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God*'. No wonder the prophet cries out '*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God*'.

How good are we at praising God? Do we make time and space in our daily prayers to offer God praise and adoration? Or are we sometimes a bit too quick to rush onto our list of needs and concerns? Passages like these from Isaiah and the psalms are by no means unique – there is much throughout the Old Testament which suggests that the worship of God in the wilderness and then in the Temple was enthusiastic, noisy even, demanding and sacrificial. As in these two passages, lots of reasons are given for praising God with

energy and passion, for God is Creator, Redeemer, Protector and Salvation – and much more besides. So, despite the reserved 'British' nature by which some of us are gripped, we might be inspired in this Christmas season to let rip a little and really go for those carols which speak of glory, herald angels and being joyful and triumphant!

Let's go now to the heart of Jewish worship, to the Temple in Jerusalem, just after Jesus has been born over two thousand years ago and see what we find there. Perhaps each of us identifies with one of these characters today. We might want to close our eyes or let our gaze fall softly on a candle or an image as we enter the story ourselves for a few minutes…

We read of a humble young couple quietly coming into the Temple carrying their tiny son, about 6 weeks old… their hearts are full of joy, but they are tired too, and the mother is probably sore. They're both a bit bewildered – how have they ended up in this story? How are they going to bring up this child – who is both so ordinary and so extraordinary. They have come to worship and offer sacrifice according to their religious law; nothing showy, nothing extravagant – a pair of turtledoves or pigeons is all they can afford to demonstrate their faithfulness, their obedience, their worship.

We read of a man called Simeon, probably an old man as he seems to expect soon to die. He is righteous and devout and is full of God's Holy Spirit. He knows deep down that his many years of prayer and worship are going to be crowned by him seeing with his own eyes the longed-for Saviour whom God has sent. So with trembling hands he takes this baby into his arms and pours out his soul in praise, as he is filled with peace and a sense that his life is complete.

As Simeon prophesies over their young child, calling him a '*light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to the people Israel'*, Mary and Joseph are amazed. But then the old man's voice takes on a different note, now he is speaking about the '*falling and rising of many in Israel'*, now he mentions a '*sign that will be opposed'*, now he looks directly at Mary and says, '*and a sword will pierce your own soul too'*. What does this mean? What are they going to experience? What harm will come to their tiny son?

Then Anna enters the story – she is certainly very elderly and has known heartbreak in her life, widowed after only seven years of marriage. Yet her face glows with an inner light of praise and thankfulness. She too has sensed that this baby is someone very special and her own aches and pains, her losses and sorrows, are forgotten as she sings the praises of God and tells all who will listen that this child is the one who will save them all.

Their duty done and these extraordinary encounters over, the couple leave the temple and make the journey back to their home territory where the child grows and develops under the favour of God. None of them will ever be the same after this day.

Will we?

(You may want to pause for a while for reflection, or lead a short prayer, maybe a time of music?)

Questions for discussion or reflection:

- What part does praising God play in your life? What do you find easy, what do you find difficult about praising God?
- How helpful is this year's focus on joy and sorrow in the Connexion? How has it spoken to you over this Christmas season?
- Does your story resonate with any of the stories in this Gospel passage?

- In your life, who have been the Simeons and Annas who have inspired, warned or encouraged you?
- If your story includes pain and sorrow, how do you live with that day by day?[4]

Hymn:
229 STF – Mary and Joseph came to the Temple OR
219 STF – We see the eyes of Mary shine

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God, in this season of peace and goodwill, we notice the hurts and sorrows of the world and we bring our prayers today:

For all who struggle to praise you because of hunger or thirst, lack of shelter or warmth…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with grace into your world again

For your body around the world, seeing to share your glory, your salvation, your love with all…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with power into your world again

For all who feel abandoned or forgotten by you, exiled or isolated by other people…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with comfort into your world again

For all who are trying to raise a family without adequate support or resources…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with strength into your world again

For all for whom Christmas brings pain and grief close to the surface…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with courage into your world again

For all living in places of occupation, war, violence and injustice…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with peace into your world again

For all who are in pain today, in body, mind or spirit, and for those who offer treatment and nursing…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with healing into your world again

For all nearing the end of life, and all who love them, care for them and will miss them…

Lord in your mercy, hear and come with rest into your world again

We offer our prayers in confidence in you, Jesus Christ, our incarnate God, our daily companion, our inspiration.

Thanks be to God,

Amen.[5]

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[4] Reflection written by Jill Baker

[5] Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

We will now take up the offering.

The greatest present of all is the gift of your love for us, O God, the gift of the Christ who comes to meet us.
Come, holy God, and bless these gifts we pray, that they might be used to share love with those in need.
Come, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.[6]

Hymn:
169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus OR
202 STF – Hark! The herald angels sing

Blessing

May the Christ in our midst, be known to you this week.

May you know the love of the Lord in your heart,
And may you find ways to share that love with those you meet.

Amen.[7]

[6] Additional prayers by Tim Baker

[7] Additional prayers by Tim Baker