National Synod of Wales

Synod Sunday Service – 30th January 2022

Welcome – AD47CA3-A63C-4051-BF1D-0A2D53826045.mov

Good morning. I’m Ian Kirby one of the ministers of the Brecon Beacons Pastorate which covers a wide area of the Usk and Wye Valleys from Abergavenny in the east to Upper Chapel in the west. There are nine chapels in the Pastorate and I share ministry with my wife, Julie who is currently off following an operation.

Call to worship (Psalm 84 v 1-5)

**1**How lovely is your dwelling place,
    O Lord of hosts!
**2**My soul longs, indeed it faints
    for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
    to the living God.

**3**Even the sparrow finds a home,
    and the swallow a nest for herself,
    where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
    my King and my God.
**4**Happy are those who live in your house,
    ever singing your praise.

**5**Happy are those whose strength is in you,
    in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

HYMN: Come people of the risen King

1 Come people of the risen king,
 who delight to bring him praise;
 come all and tune your hearts to sing
 to the Morning Star of grace.
 From the shifting shadows of the earth
 we will lift our eyes to him,
 where steady arms of mercy reach
 to gather children in.
 *Rejoice, rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!*
 *One heart, one voice; O Church of Christ, rejoice!*

2 Come, those whose joy is morning sun,
 and those weeping through the night;
 come, those who tell of battles won,
 and those struggling in the fight.
 For his perfect love will never change,
 and his mercies never cease,
 but follow us through all our days
 with the certain hope of peace.
 *Refrain*

3 Come, young and old from every land-
 men and women of the faith;
 come, those with full or empty hands-
 find the riches of his grace.
 Over all the world, his people sing-
 shore to shore we hear them call
 the truth that cries through every age
 'Our God is all in all'!
 *Refrain*

Kristyn Getty, Keith Getty (born 1974) and Stuart Townend (born 1963)
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Prayers 2AA630F-7B43-4609-9A0A-7258B6AE8.mov

 Loving God, we thank you for your love and care for us as shown in creation. Thanks you for passing seasons, times of rest, renewal and reflection contrasted with times for action and growth. Thank you that whatever life has in store for us, your presence is always with us whether we are aware of it or not.

 As we remember the presentation of your Son, Jesus, in the Temple, we thank you and praise you for sending Him to fully experience human life even up to execution as a threat to the political and religious powers.

 We thank you too for the wisdom of older folk such as Simeon and Anna whose lives of prayer, reflection, and openness to You enable them to see truth and reveal things that most people would miss.

 We confess that we often struggle to attain such standards of openness to you. Our lives are so busy, and we are often so engrossed in the sheer hard work of keeping our chapels and fellowships going that we retreat into ourselves. Forgive us when we lose sight of the wider vision of representing the Kingdom of God because the task seems too great, or we fear upsetting people and making ourselves unpopular.

 Help us to remember that You call ordinary men, women, and children to follow you and transform them through Your Holy Spirit to enable them to be Your people in Your creation. Continue to transform us by that same Holy Spirit so that we may follow their example. Amen.

So, as God’s forgiven and beloved people, let us join together in the Lord’s Prayer in whichever language is most comfortable for us.

The Lord’s Prayer. 0175A292-E51C-4F30-95D4-EF7BCBEB9F43.mov

Introduction to theme CC9D6879-C306-4DE6-A643-1ACCB060B494.mov

 Wednesday marks the celebration of Candlemas. It’s halfway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox so is the point at which we begin to look forward to Spring. Americans celebrate Groundhog Day, and it has traditionally been believed that the weather on 2nd February will have a bearing on the weather for the rest of the winter.

 Traditionally in Wales, Candlemas marked the end of the period of time when working by candlelight was allowed due to it being the dark time of the year. The candle was then handed back on February 2nd when there was enough light to not need a candle and farm animals could be fed before dark. Candles were lit on this day and carried in procession

 In the Christian calendar, Candlemas is the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. It’s often easy to lose this part of Jesus’s life in the aftermath of Christmas, which is a shame because it points the way forward to the life and mission of Christ.

READING: Luke 2 v 22-38 – Synod Service 300122 reading

**22**When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23**(as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’), **24**and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’

**25**Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24991a)] this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. **26**It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24992b)] **27**Guided by the Spirit, Simeon[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24993c)] came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, **28**Simeon[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24994d)] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

**29**‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-24995e)] in peace,
    according to your word;
**30**for my eyes have seen your salvation,
**31**    which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
**32**a light for revelation to the Gentiles
    and for glory to your people Israel.’

**33**And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. **34**Then Simeon[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25000f)] blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed **35**so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

**36**There was also a prophet, Anna[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25002g)] the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, **37**then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. **38**At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A21-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25004h)] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

HYMN: Born in the night. Intro 4C69D584-A04E-4635-AB41-66E838092EFC.mov

1 Born in the night,
 Mary's Child,
 A long way from your home;
 Coming in need,
 Mary's Child,
 Born in a borrowed room.

2 Clear shining light,
 Mary's Child,
 Your face lights up our way;
 Light of the world,
 Mary's Child,
 Dawn on our darkened day.

3 Truth of our life,
 Mary's Child,
 You tell us God is good;
 Prove it is true,
 Mary's Child,
 Go to your cross of wood.

4 Hope of the world,
 Mary's Child,
 You're coming soon to reign;
 King of the earth,
 Mary's Child,
 Walk in our streets again.
Geoffrey Ainger (1925-2013)
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Reflection – 13AADA0-DC57-41D2-AB81-3972C3B90E1E.mov

 I’m sat at my desk looking over the fields. The field next to us is covered in a heavy frost reminding me that this is still winter. When I lift my eyes, I see green field and it almost looks as if it is in early spring. The seasons are beginning to change. By the time I share this with you, we will be nearly two thirds of the way out of meteorological winter.

 Knowing when the times and seasons are changing has always been important as part of the rhythm of life. There are passages in the Bible which indicate that the transition between times and seasons is about to begin if we look closely. I consider that the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and the involvement of Simeon and Anna is one such passage.

 Everybody loves a baby and it’s natural to see this as just showing awe and wonder at the coming of new life into the world. However, I think there’s more to it than this. If we look at the story from one angle, it’s a nice story about a baby and an old couple having their hopes and promises realised. Examine it from another position and it’s all about fulfilment of law and promise and emphasising the humanity of Jesus. Yet there’s something about the words of Simeon in particular which points to events that are darker and suggest that the story may not have a happy ending.

 Simeon tells Mary that the infant Jesus is to be the cause of the rising and falling of many in Israel. If there is one thing which we can confidently state about human nature, it is that people with power are rarely inclined to relinquish that power gracefully and willingly. Messiah is one of those terms open to many interpretations but there was a widespread hope and belief that the coming of such a person would involve a cleansing of the present religious and/or political system. Simeon recognises that not only that this child is the one sent from God to perform this mission but also that this mission will have painful consequences.

 Of course, a long time has passed since them and as we look around the world, it seems that not much has changed. It’s easy to conclude that nothing will happen in our lifetimes or that Simeon was merely referring to a spiritual revolution which happens within each one of us and prepares us for the life to come. I wonder whether in doing this we are doing the revolutionary strand in the Bible a disservice.

 Mark’s gospel opens with Jesus proclaiming, ‘The Kingdom of God is among you’. In Caesar’s time that was a dangerously political statement and even now it is immensely challenging because it reclaims the world with values which run contrary to the values that we see every day around us. You don’t end up on a cross, executed as a political threat by the occupying Romans, for just being an interesting religious teacher with some novel spiritual ideas.

 In the light of this, how do the words of Simeon resonate with us today? Despite those who would seek to persuade us otherwise, the Kingdom of God is still among us, evidenced by those who work for love, justice, peace, and care for the created order. As followers of Jesus, we are called to join in this work wherever we find it because by doing so we are working for the Kingdom of God. Our work in campaigning on behalf of the environment, the poor and the marginalised should stand alongside our proclamation of the Gospel through words and making disciples. They all stand as signs that winter is receding, and that spring would soon be here.

 It’s been a long winter. We may feel this particularly this year due to COVID and the restrictions it has put on our individual lives and our lives as congregations. Many of us will have stories of loved ones who have died too soon, farewells which were not how we wanted them to be and time that has passed too slowly. We can but hope that things will change for the better soon.

 It is inevitable that there will be setbacks from time to time. We are all too aware that heavy snow and freezing temperatures can cause havoc well into spring. We do not know how the COVID virus will mutate next. Simeon makes it clear that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God will not end well (in earthly terms) for both Jesus and Mary.

 What changes the narrative is not the crucifixion but the resurrection. Many so-called Messiahs were put to death but only the real one rose from the dead. We know from history that things have a limited time or season and then move on, even if sometimes it looks like one step forward, two steps back. We believe that the resurrection defeated the worst that the world could throw at Jesus and in that we have our hope for ourselves and the whole created order, even if the resistance seems to take an interminable amount of time to mop up.

 The frost has almost melted now. I suspect given the clear skies it will return tonight. Yet the days get longer, and the seasons are changing and one day God’s great clean-up plan will be unfurled in all its complete glory.

Prayers

Let us pray for the breaking in of God’s kingdom…….

Let us pray that God’s kingdom may break into the world of politics so that those elected might care more about serving the people than maintaining their own power and reputations. Help them to make decisions for the benefit of all rather than just their supporters and give them wisdom and courage in making these decisions. We remember all who represent us not just in Parliament and the Senedd but also on local and parish councils.

Let us pray that God’s kingdom may break in to the world of work and business so that people may be paid a fair wage and that the necessities of life might be available to everyone at a reasonable cost.

Let us pray that God’s kingdom may break in when we consider our attitude to the planet we live on and God’s creation. May the world value your creation as something to be enjoyed and cherished rather than something to be exploited for greed and gain.

Let us pray for God’s kingdom to be visible in this world through the body of Christ, of which we are part. We pray for the Church universal, the United Reformed Church of which we are part and all how are part of the life of the Synod of Wales that You will enable us to do this.

Finally, let us pray for our homes, families and friends and all who we love and are concerned about as we offer them to God in a short time of silence.

Hear all our prayers as we offer them in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour

Amen.

HYMN: The Kingdom of God Intro at 36B6A67E-C1C6-405A-B4E7-0DA9B8950FDC.mov

1 The kingdom of God
 Is justice and joy,
 For Jesus restores
 What sin would destroy;
 God's power and glory
 In Jesus we know,
 And here and hereafter
 The kingdom shall grow.

2 The kingdom of God
 Is mercy and grace,
 The lepers are cleansed,
 The sinners find place,
 The outcast are welcomed
 God's banquet to share,
 And hope is awakened
 In place of despair.

3 The kingdom of God
 Is challenge and choice,
 Believe the good news,
 Repent and rejoice!
 His love for us sinners
 Brought Christ to his cross,
 Our crisis of judgement
 For gain or for loss.

4 God's kingdom is come,
 The gift and the goal,
 In Jesus begun,
 In heaven made whole;
 The heirs of the kingdom
 Shall answer his call,
 And all things cry glory
 To God all in all!

Bryn Rees (1911-1983)
© Alexander Scott

Blessing. FC7634A5-C91A-413E-96C0-BE29F633CC27.mov

May the blessing of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and remain with us and all God’s beloved people made in the divine image, now and evermore. Amen.