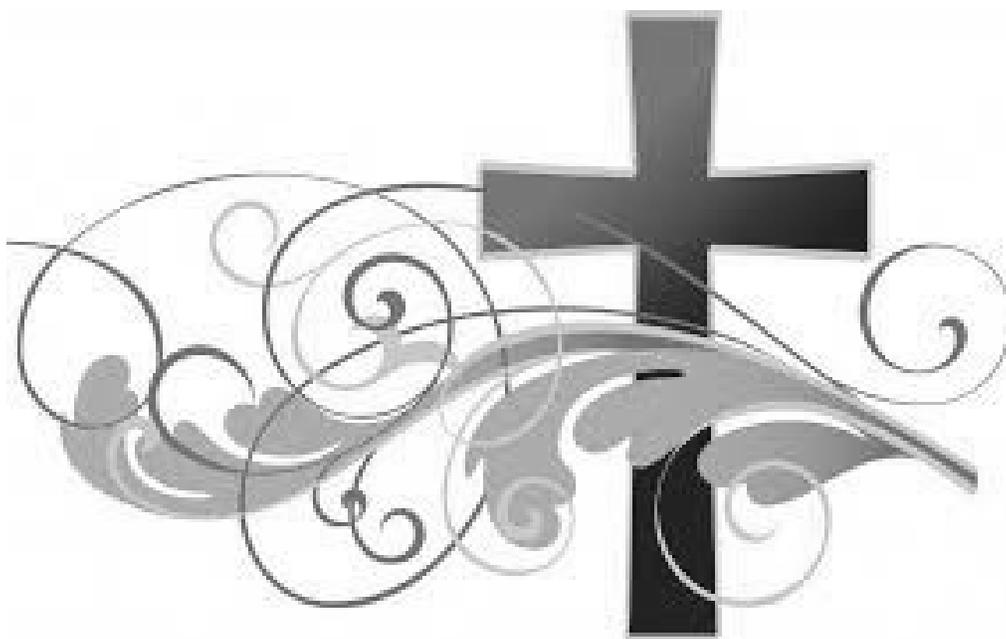


A month of Sundays

January 2022



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

Sunday 2nd January 2022

Call to worship

Arise, shine for your light has come!
As the magi followed the star to a new place,
a place where dreams became reality,
let us follow our Lord and saviour
to a place of renewed hope.
Not looking back, but always moving forward,
let us seek and find the king.

Amen.

Prayer

God the Father, who calls us to set forth:

We worship and adore you.

Christ the Son who journeys with us:

We worship and adore you.

Holy Spirit who inspires us for the road ahead:

We worship and adore you.

Amen.

By a heavenly sign you called them, those seekers
who crossed sands and rivers and rocky places to find you.
We praise you for the example of their perseverance
in their pilgrimage to prove the truth of their observations.
So, Lord, we thank you for calling us to the pilgrimage
of this New Year; for the journey we must make through it,
no turning back, and for the inner journeys into our faith
and spirituality and the epiphanies they will bring.
We set forth in faith.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12 Visitors arrive from eastern lands

Reflection Carolyn Hothersall

These days we are so used to getting from one place to another as quickly as possible that we don't often see the journey itself as part of the outing. Those who cycle, or walk can take in so much more of their surroundings, noticing small details or things that have changed since the last time, hearing even the tiniest sounds and identifying their source, absorbing the smells and feeling the air against their faces. It's an opportunity to travel in wonder and with appreciation.

And how much more helpful it is to walk or journey with a companion, where those observations can be shared, or when worries can be discussed or deep questions asked. It is when journeying together that new hope, new possibilities, can emerge. We are not trying to solve everything on our own; it is a shared experience. Jesus wants to walk besides us in the darkness and sadness of our lives and bring us out of the wreckage with new, or renewed, hope. Jesus wants to be the person who journeys with us. Walking with Jesus doesn't mean we will never journey through dark times, just that it is not something we have to do alone.

The journey the magi made wouldn't have been an easy one. There were probably times when the way ahead seemed long and dark, perhaps never-ending, even hopeless. There are many experiences in life – such as loss, pain, or suffering, of any kind –

that can make us feel like that. And in those times, it is good to have someone with us on our journey, someone to share the load, the burden of it all. The magi had each other. We may have friends and family but knowing that Jesus walks with us is reassuring too. It can give us the strength to keep going. The wise men followed the star; its light encouraged them to keep journeying on. The light of Jesus shines ahead of us, guiding us through those difficult times, casting a never-ending glow on new possibilities, or reminding us of more positive times.

Maybe we could take a few moments of stillness and quiet to think about those who have shared our life journey with us, people who have helped us on our way: some for maybe the whole of our lives; some perhaps fleetingly; most somewhere in between. Help us to consider how we might be the travelling companion along life's road for others who may need someone to listen, to share, and to find new ways forward. Let's also remember that Jesus is always with us, the ultimate companion for the road ahead.

Prayer

We picture Mary and Joseph, huddled in a dirty, draughty stable for shelter, and we pray for all who are homeless.

We think of baby Jesus, laid in a feeding trough for cattle, and we pray for all children born into poverty.

We tremble at Herod's wrath, and we pray for all families living in danger; especially we imagine the fear in their hearts as Mary and Joseph fled their homeland, and we pray for all refugees forced to do likewise today.

May we see in every exiled mother the troubled face of Mary, in every refugee father the careworn countenance of Joseph, and in every impoverished child the helpless, vulnerable innocence of the baby Jesus. **Amen.**

Blessing

God of hope, Jesus our companion, Holy Spirit our strength,
travel with us as we journey onwards
into paths known and unknown, familiar and unfamiliar,
through times of darkness and into your marvellous light,
always knowing that you are by our side. **Amen.**

Sunday 9th January 2022

Hymn: Be Still for the presence of the Lord STF 20

Call to worship:

Holy Lord, Be near us as we gather in your name to celebrate in prayer during today early in the start of our new year. May we look forward to the months ahead in hope and joy. Fill us with renewed faith and confidence to proclaim your message across Preston-Ribble Circuit and beyond. Give us a new sense of purpose as we journey together as a church in 2022. May we also listen to your voice and respond generously in faith giving time to others in need. Lord, hear our prayer and fill us with hope and expectation in our hearts as we bring the Gospel of good news to others. May you bless us all and fill us with the richness and love. Amen

Opening Prayers

Father, We thank you for your amazing power and work in our lives, thank you for your goodness and for your blessings over us. Thank you that you are able to bring hope through even the toughest of times, strengthening us for your purposes. Thank you for your great love and care and for your mercy and grace.

Forgive us for when we don't thank you enough, for who you are, for all that you do, for all that you've given. Help us to set our eyes and our hearts on you afresh. Renew our spirits, fill us with your peace and joy. We love you and we need you, this day and every day. We give you praise and thanks, for You alone are worthy!

Lord fill us with your spirit and give us the grace and patience to work through all the challenges ahead which this year may bring. In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**

Prayer for the year ahead :

Father we thank you for every seat that has been filled here, today. For each mind and heart that fills the presence of this room, we thank You. Only you truly know what we are setting out to accomplish today. We have an idea, a vision, hints, and daily instructions. We have talents, abilities, and time to work. However, only You can see in perfect detail the end of every beginning. Every project, every season, every life. Nothing is ever in vain, for even mistakes and missteps are used for good.

Your righteousness transcends all our efforts and understanding. Forgive us for our pride. The pride that puffs us up and the pride that threatens to unqualify us. Strengthen our confidence in who You have made us to be. Set us free from comparison in order to work together efficiently in the year ahead.

Bless all those gathered today, all those present, as well as the lives of those we will encounter afterward. Ready us to make every moment count. In Jesus' Name, **Amen**

Hymn: Be still and know that I am God STF 18

Bible reading: Psalm 29 and Luke 3:15-17 and 21-22

Reflection: (Simon Skidmore):

“Looking back and Looking ahead”

At this time of year in January, we are often spending moments of things about the Christmas and New Celebrations which have just ended whilst thinking about the events of last year whilst also looking ahead to what is to come this year. It is very much a time of pondering and reflection but one of anticipation and hope. I'm very much looking forward to the season of spring already and wishing for the lighter nights which are coming soon and welcoming the migrant birds which will be arriving from March onwards until the summer. I'm sure many of us feel very weary with regards to how long the winter has lasted and indeed how long too the Covid pandemic has lasted for and often wonder when will it end and have our lives now changed forever as a result and will things ever return to normal?

I'm sure there were many people before Jesus' birth thinking exactly the same for different reasons? When will the Messiah arrive, when will the Romans leave our land and when can we be truly free again? Although we may not be free in a physical sense we perhaps need to reclaim and remind ourselves of the freedom which Jesus gives us in terms of new life. In entering our world God, becoming human Jesus experienced all the hopes, joys and sorrows which we have in our lives too. Jesus lived among us and knows exactly what it is like. He knows what it is like to lose someone as he wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He knows what's it's like to live in a land with restrictions as well. He is he with us today too. Our God is one of hope, love, joy, peace, aspirations and one that gives life even in dark times. He is the one who changes everything for us. If we hold onto this even when we might feel like giving up at times, he will be there to both comfort and to strengthen and heal. His burden is easy and his yoke is light. May Jesus give us a renewed sense of faith this year even when the burden at times can feel overwhelming and too heavy to lift. May we be inspired too by the wonder of the amazing things

that God is doing in our lives in our communities and hold onto them even in the times when the darkness can cover us. Let us be an example to others that shine in love, faith and hope.

Hymn: Bread of Life Truth Eternal STF 578

Prayers:

Lord Jesus, we reach out to you in prayer today in our new year of 2022. We ask you to bless each and everyone one of us gathered together today and enrich our lives. We pray that over the year ahead we spend real time in service, prayer, and ministry to others. We pray for our church community here in Preston-Ribble Circuit that we become even more a church that develops and grows to be faithful in love, faith, worship, and action. Lord hear our prayer. **Amen.**

Lord God hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, we pray for an end to the global pandemic that has changed our lives in so many different ways. We pray for those who have experienced loss and may you bring comfort and hope to them. We pray for staff working in our NHS and for those caring for people who are ill. May you bring light to them. **Amen**

Lord God hear our prayer.

Lord of Mercy, we pray for all those who volunteer their time in different roles in service of you within our churches across the Preston-Ribble Circuit. We pray that they will experience an opportunity for renewal and will be blessed this year ahead as they continue to be an example to others. **Amen**

Lord God hear our prayer.

Lord of Hope, as we rise to meet each new day, please let us be filled with Your spirit. Wherever we go, let us spread love, joy, peace, goodness, and faithfulness. Let us desire to become more like you and to worship you in all we do. Help us desire these things so much more than the sin that entices us. Thank you for always going before us. In Jesus' Name, **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father....

Blessing:

God of light and hope look upon us with love and fill us with the spirit of Jesus in our new year of 2022, that we may love you and serve you in your kingdom. Bless us all in the months to come and fill us with the joy of the Good News and may we bring hope and faith to others. Let us be filled with confidence to proclaim your name and find new opportunities to serve and worship you and make a difference in our world today. In Jesus name, Amen.

Hymn: I am a new creation: STF 553

Sunday 16th January 2022

Call to Worship:

This is the day that the Lord has made.
This is the day when he can be found.
God of all, breath of life,
Living water, Saviour, friend.
Come as the hungry; feed on his Word
Come as the thirsty, drink of his Love
Come as the faithful, worship the Lord.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 152 This is the day that the Lord has made.

Prayers

Creator God, we glimpse your beauty
in setting sun, mountain top, and eagle's wing.
We sense your power in thunder crash,
lightning flash and ocean's roar.
Creator God we praise you

Precious Jesus, we see your love
stretched out upon a cruel cross.
We stand in awe at your sacrifice,
pure love poured out for humankind.
Precious Jesus we praise you

Holy Spirit, we see your power
in lives transformed, hearts on fire.
We listen for your still, small voice,
comforting, guiding, calling.
Holy Spirit we praise you

The Lord's Prayer

Reading John 2 v 1-11

Reflection by Denise Johnson

What a wonderful story this is. Jesus was a guest at a wedding, and they had run out of wine! Jesus refreshes the stock and changes water into wine – not just any wine but good wine, the best. Wine is widely viewed in the Bible as a symbol of happiness, and a wedding is certainly the happiest of occasions. In Mark's gospel this is Jesus' first act of ministry – it was certainly a crowd pleaser. This was the first sign that Jesus was something special, could he be the one, the messiah, the

saviour. The wedding at Cana turned out to be the perfect place for Jesus to demonstrate God's love and plan to bring joy and peace to the Earth forever.

In his very helpful book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis has pointed out that every miracle of Jesus is simply a kind of short-circuiting of a natural process; a doing instantly something which in general takes a longer period of time. Lewis says, "Each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvas of nature." This was a miracle that, at the centre of a community act of joy demonstrated that God was with them, at the centre of all and not distant and untouchable. The organised religion of the day kept God at arm's length, holy and remote but in this unassuming guest at a wedding God arrived!

In this first month of the year we often make promises to change our lives – become fitter, eat less or learn a new skill. Maybe in 2022 we try to become more connected with this God who is with us. Make efforts to see where God touches the earth. Celtic spirituality talks of “thin places” – places where the distance between us and God is shortened. Where are the “thin places” for you? Where are the holy moments where your heart beats faster and your skin tingles? God is with us, God has arrived with the best wine for us to drink, the greatest joy for us to experience and the deepest peace to own.

“A TOUCHING PLACE HYMN”

Christ's is the world in which we move,
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love,
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,
And Christ is the One who meets us here.

Refrain: To the lost Christ shows his face;
To the unloved He gives His embrace;

To those who cry in pain or disgrace,
Christ, makes, with His friends, a touching place

Feel for the people we most avoid.
Strange or bereaved or never employed;
Fear that their living is all in vain.

Feel for the parents who lost their child,
feel for the woman whom men have defiled.
Feel for the baby for whom there's no breast,
And feel for the weary who find no rest.

Feel for the lives by life confused.
Riddled with doubt, in loving abused;
Feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,
Which longs to be pure but fears to begin.

Prayers of Intercession

In our moments of doubt and unbelief,
when worldly pressure or circumstance
become the distance between us,
draw near, we pray.

Remind us of the grace that we first knew,
your healing touch, the Father's love,
the Spirit's breath.

Grant us courage, a faith that endures
and the sure knowledge that you are with us
in our journeying, now and always.

Blessing

The love of God be the passion in your heart.
The joy of God your strength when times are hard .
The presence of God a peace that overflows.
The Word of God the seed that you might sow.

Sunday 23rd January 2022

A prayer of approach

Today, Lord God, we come before you as is our custom; as was the custom of Jesus growing up in Nazareth. We await your Word to us now, just like those who waited while he spoke in the synagogue after his ministry had begun. May we hear your call and stand with him and with one another, to serve freely in the work you have given us. **Amen.**

A prayer of adoration

God of heaven and earth, we kneel in adoration before the mystery made manifest in your Son, Jesus, who stood with us, as one of us. So, we stand with one another in adoring you by living the way of love and life he showed us, setting us free to serve in the fullness of your grace. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

Lord, we confess that we tend to see our calling as individual. 'What would you have me do?' we ask. 'Where might I be best used?' And, of course, that is part of our calling, for you see us as individuals.

We are also called to stand alongside one another in our service, and we sometimes forget this.

But you, Father, always see the bigger picture.

Forgive us for being so caught up in our own spheres that we fail to see the need to stand with our brothers and sisters, to serve together in the advancement of your kingdom. **Amen.**

Sometimes our vision is limited; not so much tunnel vision as a warped way of seeing, wrapped around ourselves and the world

as we know it.

Our pictures of Jesus have been formed by rose-tinted paintings – a man dressed in spotless white, blonde and blue-eyed. Yet you forgive us our childish and short-sighted understanding, Lord. Correct our vision, we pray, so that we may see the poor carpenter of Galilee, Jesus the Jew. Thank you for forgiving us when we think everybody is like us. **Amen.**

Reading: Luke 4.14-21

Jesus goes to his home synagogue in Nazareth. He reads out some verses from the scroll of Isaiah to the people present. He tells them that this Scripture is coming true today. The people listening to Jesus in the synagogue for the first time where he had grown up would have been shocked. They are hearing a neighbour expressing revolutionary views.

The readings remind us that God's justice is for everyone, affirm our equality in God's eyes and that we are all valuable, and invite us to take action in support of our community.

Jesus makes it clear that the 'weaker' members of the body are those he has come to help. If we are poor, he will bring us good news. If we are imprisoned, he will release us. If we are blind, he will restore our sight and if we are oppressed, he will set us free. But what does this actually mean? How does this liberation happen?

Perhaps we can see how this liberation happens by looking at Jesus' ministry begins with a bold and disruptive statement. He chooses passages that speak not of the rich and powerful but of the poor and oppressed, of bringing justice and release.

Jesus goes on to heal, to accept those who are rejected.

He eats with the unacceptable. He is arrested, condemned and crucified as the worst of criminals. Jesus is a disruptive voice.

Who are the disruptive voices today? Perhaps those at the heart of social justice movements are included, such as Lori Anne Thompson, who faced institutional re-abuse when she revealed her sexual abuse by the evangelist minister Ravi Zacharias (#MeToo, #ChurchToo), and Jarel Robinson-Brown, the black Anglican priest who created a media fury when he spoke up against 'the cult of white British nationalism' in February 2021 (#BLM). If Jesus read that Scripture to us today, what chains of oppression might his words imply? What is our role in bringing freedom?

Oscar Romero showed us one way. As the Roman Catholic Archbishop of El Salvador, although from a humble background himself, his role put him on a par with the rich, ruling elite. This was in the 1970s and 80s, a time when there was massive inequality between the rich land-owning minority and the poor majority in South America. Worker priests, exploring the meaning of Bible passages such as today's readings, were teaching a gospel that had a 'bias to the poor' and challenged the government to reform.

Archbishop Romero was dramatically converted to this view when his friend and fellow priest, Fr Rutilio Grande, was murdered by the security forces for his activism with the poor. Romero began to teach what is known now as liberation theology. He explains it like this: 'A building is on fire and you're watching it burn, standing and wondering if everyone is safe. Then someone tells you that your mother and your sister are inside that building. Your attitude changes completely. You're frantic; your mother and sister are burning, and you'd do anything to rescue them even at the cost of getting charred. That's what it means to be truly committed. If we look at poverty from the outside, as if we're looking at a fire, that's not to opt for the poor, no matter how concerned we may be. We should get inside as if our own mother and sister were burning. Indeed it's Christ who is there, hungry and suffering.'

This is the challenge for us today. To 'get inside' poverty and oppression, as though it were our family, indeed Christ, who is suffering...to demonstrate our bias for the poor.

1 Jesus, stand among us
at the meeting of our lives,
be our sweet agreement
at the meeting of our eyes.
O Jesus, we love you, so we gather here,
join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

Prayers of intercession

We are members of one body.

We rejoice in our diversity and the gifts that each person
in this fellowship brings to the body of Christ.

Lord God, when one is honoured, we are all honoured.

We pray for those who lead our nation, our church and our
communities...

When one is in need, we are all in need.

We pray for those who are working for peace around the world...

When one suffers, we all suffer.

We pray for those who seek your healing in our community...

When one leaves us, we are all bereft.

We remember those who have died in faith, and those who are
bereaved...

When one rejoices, we all rejoice.

Amen.

God, you call us to be the body of Christ in this place.

Side by side, hand in hand, help us to stand together,

to stand with our neighbours,

to break free from all that holds us back

from making the world as you want it to be.
In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Sunday 30th January 2022

Jesus our friend, may we be prepared to listen.
Jesus our neighbour, may we be prepared to speak.
Jesus our Saviour, may we be prepared to act.

Hymn 157 – God has spoken by His prophets

Let us pray:

God, whose love is vast and measureless,
wider than the universe, unlimited and infinite:
In wonder, **we worship you.**

God, whose love will never run dry,
will never fall short, will never fail:
In wonder, **we worship you.**

We praise you that your love reaches us,
in our struggles and our joys,
in our sorrows and disappointments.

We praise you that in your love
you meet us as we are, where we are

God, your love is beyond all we can tell,
yet we know that you are here with us,
and that you care for every detail of our lives.
We offer you hearts filled with gratitude.
In wonder, **we worship you. Amen.**

Reading: Luke 4: 21 - 30

Reflection (by Rev Janet)

One of the problems with our modern media and the social media that is part of our lives is the sheer amount of information we have to deal with. Sometimes it is a good thing – for example, when we find out things that might in a previous age have been kept hidden, or that certain important people haven't told the truth. And sometimes we hear or read things from the people that we don't normally listen to. From the politicians from other parties. From people of other races and cultures that we don't normally meet in our daily lives. And from other generations. How many parents really listen to their children? How many teenagers complain, 'You never listen to me'?

Younger people can have a great deal to say to us. When she was only 15 years old Greta Thunberg started a movement for climate change that has inspired millions of people to get involved in action to save the planet. Malala Yousafzai, the teenager from Pakistan who was shot by the Taliban for campaigning for girls' right to education, was awarded the Nobel Prize at just 17 years old for that same work. And in March 2020, 23-year-old England and Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford started working with the food charity, FareShare, raising over £20 million to combat food poverty in the UK, and inspiring thousands to join in a campaign that forced a change in government policy on free school meals. Like the Old Testament prophets, what they had to say was so important, people listened. So, we should all be encouraged that we can speak out on something that is important, even if we think that no-one will listen to us.

Jesus shocked his home village by saying that God's message of love, freedom and good news is just as much for outsiders as it is for us. No-one wanted to listen to him; they were so angry to hear his message that they tried to drive him out and throw him over a cliff! Sometimes the voices we need to hear have disturbing messages that we don't want to listen to: the victims of abuse; the

communities that still face discrimination, even from Christians; the people who have been exploited or trafficked, modern slaves; black people, people with disabilities who highlight the racism and exclusion in British society, including our churches. Do we listen to them? Do we hear them and respond?

We are also challenged to speak with outsiders whom we don't normally meet: ex-prisoners who've committed crimes that make them 'monsters' in our eyes; refugees who we think should take second place to 'our own' people; those excluded by the stigma of serious mental health issues; homeless people battling with addiction and abuse.

Jesus is clear that the good news is for all of them. Do we listen to him, or do we close our ears and our hearts?

How are we reaching out in love to people who are 'not like us'?

Let us pray for others, and especially for those who are 'not like us':

O God, our Heavenly Father,
give us a vision of our world as Your love would make it:
a world where the weak are protected
and none go hungry or poor;
a world where the benefits of civilized life are shared,
and everyone can enjoy them;
a world where different races, nations and cultures
live in tolerance and mutual respect,
a world where peace is built with justice,
and justice is guided by love;
and give us the inspiration and courage to build it,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

We pray for the world and the Church, thankful of God's goodness. We pray for the poor and for prisoners, for the unemployed and for the homeless,

for those who will go without food today,
and for those who have the power to feed them.

We pray for those who live in places of conflict,
for refugees and those fleeing war,
for those who experience conflict at home or at work,
and for those with the power to negotiate peace.

We pray for those who have been oppressed,
for victims of crime, for children, women and men who feel
unsafe, and for those who administer justice.

We pray for those we know who are in need, for those who are ill
or housebound, for the very young and very old, and for all those
who care for them.
Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for ourselves, for faith and hope and love to flood our
lives, and for the grace to pass those gifts of God to others.
Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn 713 – Show me how to work for justice

Blessing

Lord, send us on in your name,
To serve the world and love our neighbour as ourselves,
Send us on to be channels of your peace and grace to all. Amen.