

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
On-line Service for 3rd January 2021

compiled by Rev Dawn Brown and Bill Naylor

Theme: Becoming who we are

Call to worship: Based on Isaiah 60



Arise, shine; for your light has come!

God's glory has risen upon us.

Despite the state of this world:

Despite illness, despite fear;

Despite disappointment, despite injustice;

Despite sadness, despite violence;

Despite grief, and despite despair-

God's glory will appear over us.

Lift up your eyes and look around:

See the light of God's hope, the light of God's peace,

the light of God's joy, the light of God's love.

See the light of God's healing for us, for our community, for our world.

Let us lift up our eyes and look around.

Then we shall see and be radiant,

our hearts shall thrill and rejoice.

Hymn: Arise and shine Christopher Idle (from Isaiah 60)

1. Arise and shine! Your light has come as Christ dispels the night:
All nations under heaven's dome shall cast away their deepening gloom
To seek the Lord's great light, God's sunrise beaming bright.

2. Lift up your eyes around, and see as people come from far:
And gladly crossing land and sea wise men with tribute there shall be,
For truly wise they are as those who saw the star.

3. Yet richer frankincense and gold affirm the Saviour's praise:
Wherever Jesus' name is told new treasures now replace the old:
God's love explores new ways and sets new hope ablaze.

4. Some worshipped once the child divine and saw the human face;
Some tasted water turned to wine, believed the word that gave the sign,
And grew in every place as first-fruits of his grace.

5. So those whom God in Israel blessed, the first in Christ reborn,
With joy shall welcome all the rest who come from north, south, east and west,
By shining splendour drawn to greet the rising dawn.

Prayers of thanksgiving:

With the horrors of 2020 behind us and a New Year just begun we pray dear Lord for a new beginning with You.

We praise and thank You for the wonderful news of the availability of another Covid vaccine and with it the prospect of better, safer times ahead.

Our prayers however remain with all the people who are suffering ill health, for whatever reason. Those at home, in hospital or permanent care.

And we both thank You and pray for all those who put themselves at risk by putting the needs of other people before their own. We think of our NHS workers, Emergency services staff, essential public servants such as transport employees, waste collectors and all those working to make available the gas, electricity and water and our whole food chain. And let's not forget all the volunteers who do such wonderful work. So many acts of kindness.

But Lord, we also pray for ourselves. Not only for our physical needs but for our spiritual health and that in this New Year we will pray and read our Bibles in order to learn and to re-align ourselves with Your sovereign will.

Let us now say **The Lord's Prayer** together:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen**

Hymn: An army of ordinary people Dave Bilbrough

1. An army of ordinary people a Kingdom where love is the key,
A city, a light to the nations, heirs to the promise are we.
A people whose life is in Jesus, a nation together we stand.
Only through grace are we worthy, inheritors of the land.

**A new day is dawning, a new age to come,
When the children of promise, shall flow together as one:
A truth long neglected, but the time has now come,
When the children of promise, shall flow together as one.**

2. A people without recognition, but with Him a destiny sealed,
Called to a heavenly vision: His purpose shall be fulfilled.
Come let us stand strong together, abandon ourselves to the King
His love shall be ours for ever, this victory song we shall sing. **A new day is dawning ...**

Old Testament Reading: **Isaiah 60: 1-6 The Glory of Zion** New International Version

1 "Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.
3 Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
4 "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar and your daughters are carried on the hip.
5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.
6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

Hymn: **As with gladness** William Chatterton Dix **StF 224 / H&P 121**

1. As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright:
So, most gracious Lord, may we evermore your splendour see.
2. As with joyful steps they sped Saviour, to your lowly bed,
There to bend the knee before You, whom heaven and earth adore:
So with ever-quickenning pace may we seek your throne of grace.
3. As they offered gifts most rare at your cradle plain and bare,
So may we with holy joy pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to you, our heavenly king.
4. Holy Jesus, every day keep us in the narrow way,
And when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last:
Where they need no star to guide, where no clouds your glory hide.
5. In the heavenly city bright none shall need created light
You, its light, its joy, its crown, You its sun which goes not down;
There for ever may we sing alleluias to our King.

Meditation: **No room in the bin** by Bill Naylor

(**Spot the Carol - How many carol references can you find?**)

In some ways Christmas is a nightmare! Biggest problem is that everything stops - I can't wait for things to get back to the 9.00 til 5.00 routine in the January bleak midwinter. Particularly now I'm retired!

One problem in royal David's city is that by Christmas Day my wheelie is overflowing! And no idea when the bin men are coming next.

"God rest ye merry gentleman" says Margaret "Let nothing you dismay: think of it as our New Year weight-watch campaign. We can tighten our belts. No eating, no drinking and ding-dong merrily on high - less rubbish!"

Ding-dong merrily on high? Anything but! It wasn't only the frosty wind that made moan I can tell you. Call me old fashioned, call me what you like - but don't call me late for my dinner!

But it got me thinking! About the first Christmas. You know, whilst shepherds watched their flocks by night and we three kings visited the baby Jesus bringing those first Christmas presents - a Thomas the Tank ride-on, an xbox, and a lightweight crossbody bag for His swaddling clothes... the gold, frankincense and myrrh of our 2020 world.

Hope it was blue-bin day at the stables! I mean, what would they do with all the cardboard and gift wrap, because at my house when good king Wenceslas last looked out there was no room in the bin. It's crammed with our family's discarded boxes and fancy paper.

Then it came upon a midnight clear! Jesus doesn't need a bin. Not then, not now. Jesus is grateful for our gifts - which were His all along by the way - but He always keeps the wrapping paper! Saves it. Removes the dirty sticky-tape marks and irons it out to make it new and fit for use over and over again.

Now come all ye faithful - can you see what it is yet? - the wrapping paper is us and our gifts to Him are the love we show to others - in honour of Him. Better than all the gold, frankincense and myrrh in the world.

I'm going out now to empty my blue bin - after all, re-use is better than recycle ... and 'joy to the world', amid the winter's snow, I won't need to care that there's no room in the bin, because now there will be!

New Testament Reading: Matthew 2: 1-12 The visit of the Magi New International Version

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Prayer of dedication: I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus; **I have decided to follow Jesus;**
I have decided to follow Jesus; **No turning back, no turning back.**

Though none go with me, I still will follow, though none go with me I still will follow,
Though none go with me, I still will follow; No turning back, no turning back.

My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus; My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus,
My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus; No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me, the world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me; No turning back, no turning back.

Hymn:

Amazing Grace

John Newton / Chris Tomlin

1. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found was blind, but now I see

2.'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed

**My chains are gone I've been set free, my God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy rains unending love, Amazing grace**

3. The Lord has promised good to me His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures **My chains are gone ...**

4. The Earth shall soon dissolve like snow the sun forbear to shine
But God, Who called me here below will be forever mine **My chains are gone ...**

Will be forever mine You are forever mine

Message:

Becoming who we are

by Rev Dawn Brown

Let's take an informal poll this morning.

Raise your hands: how many of you consider yourselves "morning people"? Are you up at the break of dawn (or before), bright eyed and bushy tailed, energized and ready to face the day?

I have some family members like you. They say things like "once I'm up, I'm up," and they have smiles on their faces even before a cup of coffee is in their hand. I, on the other hand, am not a morning person. Actually, I'm just not an "early morning waking up" person. But when I get going, best you hold on.

The prophet Isaiah at the start of this new Year calls us to Arise and Rise with the people of Israel.

This is a wake-up call, spoken to the people of God who might have wanted to pull the covers back over their head. Here Isaiah presents a vision of hope and restoration, not just for the people of Israel, but for all of the nations. It offers timeless images of majesty and power, with God's reign breaking into everything.

The glory of the Lord is shining. Wake-Up!

Waking up and getting moving is what the Wise followers of the Star did.

And by waking up and following, the journey they went on was remarkable.

For they risked their fortunes and their reputations to travel so far – only to have their purposes nearly foiled and their lives threatened by a king.

They travelled to see royalty and they were led to kneel before a young boy born of poor parents in a small town.

They must have thought about and talked about this particular journey for the rest of their lives as it changed them – or rather made them who they were made to be. Teaching us the that following Christ is not easy and comes at a cost. Bonhoeffer in the “Cost of Discipleship” writes: “Costly grace is.... Costly because it calls us to follow and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.

It is costly because it costs a person their life, and it is grace because it gives a person the only true life.

It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.

Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

The Incarnation of God, God becoming One of Us.

God experiencing our sorrows, our difficulties, our temptations. God going to the Cross and dying the death we deserved in order to save us.

That is costly grace – it cost God everything to save us.

Even though the past year was so dark and even though we continue into 2021 in the same darkness... there is Hope

The prophet calls our attention to the ways in which God breaks into our world and illuminates our very existence. Look around, the prophet cries, and pay attention! God is here! Yes! Here! Your Christmas decorations might be packed away (or not, no judgement here), but God-among-us, Emmanuel, is not. Jesus Christ is alive and present in our world here and now. Don't crawl back under the covers or hit the snooze button. Rise! This is news worth getting up for, getting excited about.

What gets you up in the morning? Is it the pressure of an alarm clock with the knowledge that your day is fully booked with work or school or appointments? Is it the desire to get a jump on your 'to-do' list, or go for a morning run? Is it the opportunity to catch the sunrise on your porch with a cup of coffee? Isaiah might have us take a new direction with our days, beginning with an eagerness for what God is doing, or might do, in your life or in the world. How might our days be different if we adopted this perspective each morning – of looking for God's glory in the world?

The stars are a tool that can help us bring more intention to our living.

First, by helping us to “look” at things through a different lens,

And second by prompting us to “live” in a different way as a result. As Isaiah says, not to just “rise,” but to “shine” also.

So friends, rise and shine! For the light of the world has come, and our work is just beginning, Our journey to become who we really are has started, maybe not again,

For some we continue on the path.

For others we will need to get up and entangle the sheets that are holding us down.

So we can shine. Bringing gifts which will not only change our lives but the lives of all who call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus. The gifts the Wise brought, were useful to Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus in the events that were before them. Were they what was needed, we might not think so – however the wise brought their best and God used them to transform the world.

As we rise and shine, let us bring God our lives and let us follow him so that his Light can Shine through us. Jesus Christ became a human baby to draw humanity back into a special relationship with our Father. Can we become people who have that special relationship? Becoming the people we have been made to be? And allow God's light to shine as we arise this new year.

Arise and Shine!

Amen

Intercessions:

Precious Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we pray that your wonderful Gift may be manifest to us, and that we in our turn may discover our own gifts and use them to your glory. We pray for your church across the world and here in the East Durham Circuit. May people of faith learn to live in harmony and mutual respect, recognising our similarities and celebrating our differences. May this be the year when we keep ourselves faithful in our Christian lives, to let our love shine forth and to live less for ourselves and more for others.

We pray for all in authority, that this may be the year when they achieve wisdom, mercy and guidance from above. As they lead us into a new year with all the challenges, we pray we will remember they too are human beings like ourselves and needing guidance from above.

We pray for all who are without faith, hope or love. We pray for those who are sick, desperate or bereaved and for those who care for them and seek to bring them relief from their suffering. Give them the strength and courage to carry on, and hope for the future. We pray especially for all those known to us who are in special need of our prayers, and we remember them now in a moment of silence ...

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light which no darkness can quench. We remember before God those who have died and light a candle to symbolise the light of Christ, which eternally shines and brings hope. We remember ...

You turn our darkness into light; in your light shall we see light. Hear our prayer Oh Lord.

Amen

Hymn:

Henry J Van Dyke

1. Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

2. All Thy works with joy surround Thee, Earth and heaven reflect Thy rays,
Stars and angels sing around Thee, centre of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,
Singing bird and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in Thee.

3. Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,
Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother, all who live in love are Thine;
Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

4. Mortals, join the happy chorus, which the morning stars began;
Father love is reigning o'er us, brother love binds man to man.
Ever singing, march we onward, victors in the midst of strife,
Joyful music leads us Son-ward in the triumph song of life.

Blessing:

May God the Father prepare your journey,
Jesus the Son guide your footsteps,
The Spirit of Life strengthen your body,

May the Three in One watch over you, on every road that you may follow. **Amen**

Spot the Carol answer: 12 (ding-dong merrily counting as one)