

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 17 December 2023

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-3

Opening Hymn: 293 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Confession of Sin

Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Psalm 86:5-7

Hymn of Preparation: 300 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 36:1-12

New Covenant Reading: John 1:1-5

Sermon: *The Light Shines in the Darkness*

Hymn of Response: 305 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Diaconal Offering

Closing Hymn: 320 As with Gladness Men of Old

PM Worship

313 Angels, from the Realms of Glory

314 God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

315 Silent Night! Holy Night!

OT: Malachi 4:1-6

NT: John 1:6-13

Sermon: *Light & Power*

Adult Sunday School: Fellowship Lunch – No Sunday school

Suggested Preparations

Monday (12/11) Read and discuss John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (ESV)

Leon Morris writes:

The high point is recorded in the third affirmation [of verse 2]: “the Word was God.” Nothing higher could be said: all that may be said about God may fitly be said about the Word. This statement should not be watered down. Moffat renders, “the [Word] was divine.” While the English probably means much the same as does that of the NIV, the emphasis is different, and such translations are no improvement. John is not merely saying that there is something divine about Jesus. He is affirming that he is God, and doing so emphatically as we see the word order in Greek.

If that is a staggering affirmation to us, there is no reason for thinking that it was any less so to the Jewish author of this Gospel. To the Jews of the day monotheism was more than a belief commonly held. It was a conviction to be clung to with fierce tenacity. The Jews might be ground down under the heel of the Roman conquerors, but they could do more than hate their military superiors. They could despise them. The Romans were no more than ignorant idolaters, and, crass folly, believed in many gods! The Jews knew with an unshakeable certainty that there was, there could be, only one God. When John says, “the Word was God,” his words must be understood in the light of Jewish pride in monotheism. Even though this writer regarded monotheism as a central tenet in his religion he yet could not withhold from the Word the designation “God.”

He says “the Word was God,” not “God was the Word.” The latter would have meant that God and the Word were the same; it would have pointed to an identity. But John is leaving open the possibility that there may be more to “God” than the “Word” (clearly, he thought of the Father as God, and his later references indicate a similar status for the Spirit). But he lays down unequivocally that nothing less than “God” will do for our understanding of the Word.

We should perhaps notice that John refers to Jesus as God again in verse 18 and in 20:28. If the present passage refers to Jesus in his pre-incarnate state as God, verse 18 takes up the thought for the incarnate Word and 20:28 for the risen Christ. John thus asserts the deity of his Lord at three very important places in his narrative.

Read or sing Hymn 293 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Tuesday (12/12) Read and discuss Matthew 13:24-43

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do

you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables;
I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (ESV)

The mustard plant begins as a tiny seed that is buried. The leaven is hidden in the flour. The rate at which crops grow in a field is slow far too slow to watch. Throw in the weeds, and if you are hoping that the world will be a much better place by the time your children graduate from high school then there is not a great deal of encouragement for you in these parables.

However, if you are interested in having a part in building a great cathedral Jesus Christ is building the greatest Cathedral in history out of the living stones which are His people. Here is an interesting thing about the building of cathedrals in the Middle Ages. Although many craftsmen spent the bulk of their working years working on just one cathedral very few of the people who worked on a cathedral ever got to see what it looked like when it was completed. The great cathedrals in England on average took between 250 and 300 years from start to finish. That is what our involvement with the Great Commission is like as well.

If you are teaching Sunday school, you cannot possibly know how the seeds you are sowing today will develop in the grandchildren and the great grandchildren of the covenant youth

whom you are privileged to teach. That's o.k., because you can know the one thing that truly matters: Jesus Christ is at work in and through you and, in the Lord, your labor is never in vain!

We will only see the New Jerusalem in all her glory when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead. For now, we labor **in hope** with the confidence that the Master Architect who is building His Church knows exactly what He is doing!

Read or sing Hymn 300 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Wednesday (12/13) Read and discuss Psalm 36:1-12

Transgression speaks to the wicked
 deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God
 before his eyes.
For he flatters himself in his own eyes
 that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.
The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit;
 he has ceased to act wisely and do good.
He plots trouble while on his bed;
 he sets himself in a way that is not good;
 he does not reject evil.

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
 your faithfulness to the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
 your judgments are like the great deep;
 man and beast you save, O LORD.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
 The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
 and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
 in your light do we see light.

Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
 and your righteousness to the upright of heart!
Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,
 nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.
There the evildoers lie fallen;
 they are thrust down, unable to rise. (ESV)

James Montgomery Boice writes:

The conclusion of the psalm is a prayer in which David prays for others who know God and are upright (v. 10) and for himself that he may be preserved from evildoers (v. 11). So confident is he of this final deliverance that the psalm closes with a prophetic glimpse of the wicked who, in his vision, “lie fallen –thrown down, not able to rise” (v. 12).

What is the final application of the psalm? It is what we have already seen in verse 7. What distinguishes the righteous from the wicked are not the good deeds of the godly (though they inevitably express their right relationship to God by good deeds), but rather that they, in distinction from the wicked, have taken refuge under the shadow of God’s wings. The words “find refuge” mean to flee for refuge, like a man guilty of manslaughter fleeing from the avenger of blood. They mean to flee with haste and intensity, stopping for nothing, until by the full thrust of our entire natures we find safety and deliverance beneath the wings and in the unfailing mercy of Almighty God.

That mercy is to be found in Jesus Christ. He said of Jerusalem, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34). The masses of Jesus’ day missed that great blessing and perished. The masses miss them today. Do not be one of them. Come to Jesus now.

Sing or Read Hymn 305 Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming

Thursday (12/14) Read and discuss Malachi 4:1-6

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (ESV)

Because the LORD does not change, universal righteousness is coming. This is what verses 2 and 3 are saying:

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

This is a beautiful picture, but it presses upon us a trick question: Does the LORD fulfill this prophesy at His first or at His second coming? The obvious answer might be to say “at His Second coming,” since the world is still quite clearly not the way that it ought to be. But I want to suggest that the correct answer to that question is “Both!” Jesus fulfills this prophesy at both His First Coming and at His Second Coming. It is true that we do not yet see “universal righteousness.” Just as we do not yet see all things under Christ’s feet. Yet, although we don’t see this – all authority in heaven and on earth has already been given to Jesus Christ. The man Christ Jesus is currently sitting on the universe’s throne ... even though in His mercy He has not yet brought history to an end. In the same way, I think that we ought to see this prophesy of Malachi being fulfilled in two stages. At Christ’s first coming, Jesus brought in universal righteousness in principle. On the cross, He objectively took away the guilt of every person who would ever trust in Him throughout all of history – and through His resurrection all who are united with Him through faith have already been declared to be in the right. That is, we have been justified from the moment we first believe.

Think about Paul’s famous boast in Romans chapter 1:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

What is being revealed? “The righteousness of God!” Who is it being revealed to? Is it only being revealed to the Jews? No, it is being revealed to everyone ... to Jews and Gentiles alike. So, it is probably best to see this prophesy as being fulfilled in principle at Christ’s first coming, but only fully consummated at His Second.

Friday (12/15) Read and discuss John 1:6–13

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (ESV)

Do you understand what the Jewish leaders were thinking? “Are you the Christ?” “Are you Elijah?” “Are you the prophet” that Moses spoke about? The leaders of Israel understood that John was a man to be reckoned with – and that He was a man from God. But John insisted that he was merely a “voice” – a servant sent to prepare the way for the Messiah who was still to come.

That’s the point of verses 6-8. In one sense, John was in fact a light. He was a light in the same sense that Christians are called to be lights in this world – by reflecting the true light of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus would later describe John as “a burning and shining lamp” that all Israel was going out to see. But the Gospel of John wants to make clear that the Forerunner was not the true and eternal Light spoken of in verses 4 and 5. There is an infinite qualitative difference between the reflected light of even Christ’s choicest disciples and that of the LORD Himself who has come into the world in order to save it.

We shouldn’t miss the fact that John was sent by God to speak on God’s behalf. John was the LORD’s Ambassador. Now an Ambassador doesn’t speak on his own behalf but on behalf of the one who sends him. This means that John’s ministry was one of the many ways that the Father was testifying to His Son. And consider the graciousness of the Father’s purposes; the reason He sent John the Baptist was to turn the hearts of the people back to their God lest they all be consumed by judgment. John came, not that people would believe on him – but that they would believe in Jesus through him – and that believing they would have life in Christ’s name.

Read or sing Hymn 320 As with Gladness Men of Old

Saturday (12/16) Read and discuss John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (ESV)

In verse 3 we are told:

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

This verse may seem almost a bit redundant. After all, if Jesus is fully God then quite obviously He is the Creator of all things. Well sometimes repetition is important. As every teacher knows – repetition is the mother of learning. Nevertheless, I think John is doing more than helpfully driving home the point that Jesus is in fact fully God. John’s experience of Jesus didn’t begin in eternity past. It began when John the Baptist pointed him to a human being – to a fellow Jewish man of around 30 years of age – and said: “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” We don’t begin by knowing God and then add Jesus into the picture. We begin by knowing Jesus and then realizing with Thomas that he who has seen Jesus has seen the Father. The danger with this is that we can easily

end up dragging God down to merely human dimensions. John wants us to remember, when we see Jesus hanging on the cross, that hanging there was the Word who created the tree on which he hung. He created the dirt in which the post of the cross was buried. He created the Sun, the moon, and all the stars that filled the sky. He even created the very people who would put Him to death. When we come to Jesus in prayer we should remember that we are coming to the One through whom everything exists and that apart from Jesus – there is not a single thing which has been made that He did not make. If we do this, we will discover that the love of God for us is all the more astounding. When Christ bids you to His table to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, it is good to meditate on this truth: The God who created everything that exists holds out the bread to you and says: “Take! Eat! This is My body, given for you.” Who can begin to fathom such love? The God through whom uncountable galaxies have been created, took on a true human nature to give His life for the life of the world.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow’s morning and evening worship services.