

Worship at Home, Sunday 2 January 2022

Welcome to our Worship at Home for the first Sunday of the New Year, 2 January.

A New Year **Invitation to Worship**

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied, 'Go out and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'

We pray together. **Let us pray.**

Lord, we do not know what the future holds for us: exciting new opportunities for service, or seemingly insurmountable challenges to be met. But we do know one thing: you came to us at Christmas to be our companion on life's way wherever it may take us. So, as we set out into the unknown of the New Year, help us to put our hand into your hand in confidence that you are with us. Thank you for that glorious truth, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our reading is **Matthew 2: 12-18**

When the Magi had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

'A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.'

Reflection

That story of the massacre of the Holy Innocents is an integral part of the Christmas story but we not have it read in carol services, because, obviously, it happened after the birth of Jesus and the fleeing to Egypt by Joseph and Mary and the infant Jesus. And, by the New Year, after Holy Innocents' Day, we are much taken up with looking forward into the New Year. But that sad event of the Holy Innocents must not be ignored.

It is so sad, yes. We naturally ask, 'How could God allow it?' But we ask that of so many things in our individual lives and in the history of the human race. The answer is, we don't know. But we cannot pretend it did not happen. So what can we learn from it?

We learn, first, that the coming of the Kingdom with Jesus does not mean that the Kingdom has come in its completeness. It came, yes, definitely, but it is a growing Kingdom, nearer its completeness now, but still not complete.

We learn, secondly, that evil is amazingly persistent. We take one step forward, but it is sometimes followed by a step back, or even two. We cannot ignore the enduring power of evil. I suppose the most obvious example in the lifetime of many of us, or our parents, is the holocaust before and during the Second World War. But think today of Afghanistan, of Yemen, and many other places.

But it is not all doom and gloom. Think of the abolition of slavery. Think of other more recent advances. Despite the action of today's Herods, the Kingdom is still growing. You can see this in this

time of Covid in the fresh outpouring of love and acts of kindness by so many people - generous giving to food banks, the devotion and commitment of NHS staff and volunteers, people caring for their neighbours, and in so many other ways.

So we go into the New Year, with our hand in the hand of God, not knowing what the future may hold for us, for our loved ones, for our church, for the human race. But we do know we are in God's hands. Praise be to God. Amen.

Our hymn is 'Unto us a boy is born', in Singing the Faith number 218.

Unto us a boy is born!
King of all creation,
came He to a world forlorn
the Lord of every nation.

Now may Mary's Son, who came
so long ago to love us,
lead us all with hearts aflame
unto the joys above us.

Cradled in a stall was he
with sleepy cows and asses;
but the very beasts could see
that he all men surpasses.

Alpha and Omega He!
Let the organ thunder,
while the choir with peals of glee
doth rend the air asunder.

Herod then with fear was filled:
'A prince,' he said, 'in Jewry!';
all the little boys he killed
at Bethlehem in his fury.

Our prayer time. Let us pray...

Lord, we thank you again for the coming of your Son, Jesus, into human history, for the salvation he brought to us, and for all the blessings of this life.

We think, Lord, of friends we know who need our prayers because of the difficulties they are facing: church members, personal friends. We name them before you in the silence... [pause]... Bless them, Lord, according to their needs. May they know your comfort and your peace.

Lord, we think of doctors, nurses, paramedics, porters, volunteers, working in the National Health Service, so hard pressed at this time. We pray for the continuing successful administration of vaccines, and for researchers and policy makers.

Lord, we think of the places in the world where there is conflict or the threat of conflict: Yemen, Afghanistan, the Polish/Belarus border, Ukraine. Raise up people, we pray, to be peace-makers in those places.

Lord, many of our prayers are unspoken. Answer them all according to your perfect will. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

A New Year Collect

Eternal God, you sent your Son to be born among us
that we might be born again to newness of life.

Fill us with the gladness of your great redemption
that, as we begin this New Year with your blessing,
we may continue it in your favour, and live all our days as your children,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us,
the Lord make his face to shine on us, and be gracious to us;
and look on us with kindness and give us peace. **Amen**

Revd Tony Coates