

DSW Written service 5 January 2025

Call to worship

The year is new, the day is new,
The light is newly shining,
The song is newly sung.
Let's share the song,
With angels let us sing.

Hymn (STF 343)

All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
Give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
For in my helplessness You heard my cry,
And waves of mercy poured down on my life.

I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails;
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
Of death defeated and life without end.

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the Risen One, heaven's Champion,
And You reign, You reign over all!*

I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades;
Where countless worshippers will share one
song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!
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Prayers

Wonderful amazing God, beyond our words
and imagining,
we praise and adore you for your faithfulness,
for your endless love and grace,
for revealing to us the mystery of your Word.
Your glory, your greatness, your majesty,
your power, revealed in the wonder of
creation, and in Jesus Christ your Living Word,
your presence with us.
We praise and adore you for the ongoing gift of
your Holy Spirit, living within us, who continues
to reveal to us who you are, how much you
love us and how you are calling us to follow
you, to sing the song of your greatness and
dance to the unforced rhythms of your grace.
Help us Lord never to forget that as we
journey through this new year, you are with us
always, guiding us and equipping us to become
the people you have created us to be.

Loving living God, as we contemplate the
mystery of your endless grace we know we
have fallen short of what you call us to be. We
confess that sometimes we ignore your call to
us, we neglect to seek your help or look for
your guidance, and we turn away from you,
preferring to go our own way;
Help us Lord to rejoice in your promises.
Create in us a humble spirit and a loving
forgiving heart; enable us to be as generous as
you are with our time, our love, our care, our
forgiveness, especially to those who cannot
care for or forgive us or themselves.
Imprint on our hearts your words of grace and
freedom: that by the birth, death and
resurrection of Jesus Christ we are set free,
our sins are forgiven, and we can begin again to
follow you and your ways of grace and truth.
Thank you Lord.
Amen.

Old Testament reading: Jeremiah 31:7-8, 10,12-14

This is what the Lord says:

“Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the
foremost of the nations. Make your praises
heard, and say, ‘Lord, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.’

⁸ See, I will bring them from the land of the
north & gather them from the ends of the
earth.

Among them will be the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and women in labour;
a great throng will return.

¹⁰ “Hear the word of the Lord, you nations;
proclaim it in distant coastlands:

‘He who scattered Israel will gather them
and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’

¹² They will come and shout for joy on the
heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the
bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine
and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and
herds. They will be like a well-watered garden,
and they will sorrow no more.

¹³ Then young women will dance and be glad,
young men and old as well.

I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of
sorrow.

¹⁴ I will satisfy the priests with abundance,
and my people will be filled with my bounty,”
declares the Lord.

Gospel Reading: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Sermon

I wonder how you feel about dancing in church – have you ever danced as part of worship? For a time in one church where I was minister dance featured regularly as part of our worship, young and older church members would dance, individually, or as part of a group, to gentle music or a worship song (I even joined in myself a few times!) and it was wonderful to worship in a different way from usual. I've also participated in workshops where we learned how to express prayer through movement, without words, which was powerful and moving.

We tend to use words in our prayers & worship, a lot don't we? And in the Methodist and other traditions we sing as a way of expressing our worship and our faith which I guess is why the last Methodist hymnbook was called "Singing the Faith".

But with a few exceptions, we don't move around much in worship do we?

I've had several conversations over the years with friends, colleagues and church members from different cultural and Christian traditions who say only half jokingly "you don't really know how to worship God properly, you all stand so still when you worship, even when you're singing". For them singing and dancing are a natural part of worshipping God.

The Old Testament books of Chronicles and Samuel describe King David "dancing and singing before the Lord with all his might", as he and the Israelites were bringing the ark of the Lord into the city with shouts and the sound of trumpets. Michal, Saul's daughter, watched from a window and when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, "she despised him in her heart." And I wonder whether perhaps we're afraid of being despised – or at least made fun of - if we were to dance & sing to God in the same way?

Most psalms after all were written to be sung as people processed to Jerusalem for the religious festivals, and they probably danced too.

As we reach the final service in the season of Christmas, and conclude the "Hush the Noise" Advent and Christmas liturgy, these two beautiful Bible passages describe God's saving work, and his invitation to join in with Him. Jesus is portrayed as the cosmic, eternal Word, - maybe even as the song the angels have been singing - which is a song we can sing too.

In Jewish tradition, a song is used as a metaphor for God. The phrase '*The Lord is my strength and my song*' features in all 3 sections of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah (Exodus 15.2), Psalms (Psalm 118.14) and Prophets (Isaiah 12.2.).

In his *Nooma* film "Rhythm", Rob Bell explores the idea of God as song and says:
When I think of God I hear a song, a song that moves me. It has a melody and it has a groove. It has a certain rhythm. And people have heard this song for thousands and thousands of years. Across continents and cultures and time periods people have heard the song, and they've found it captivating, and they've wanted to hear more. There have always been people who say there is no song and who deny the music, but the song keeps playing. And so Jesus came to show us how to live in tune with the song.

I love the idea of God and Jesus as a cosmic song or a dance, that we are invited to join in with. In Jeremiah's vision of the future he says: *Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry,* a wonderful image of all kinds of people being caught up in a dance, moving with all their being in response to the song they hear.

There are many references in the bible to mourning turning into dancing, as God transforms all things, as he has promised to do.

The well known phrase from the beginning of John's gospel "*In the beginning was the Word.*" refers us back to Genesis, as does the reference to light and darkness. And the term 'Word' (or logos) is used frequently in the Old Testament, both for the creative work of God speaking (or singing?) new things into being, and for communication through the prophets. The word always conveys action.

I find the images of God's Word of love speaking new things into being, and creating and recreating, and of Jesus as the incarnation of the eternal divine love song, very helpful and encouraging. And the psalms and other more modern worship songs often describe God's Word of love to us, and our response of love for him.

The Message translation of Jesus' invitation to "*Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest*", includes the words: "*Learn from me the unforced rhythms of grace*", another wonderful image of the constant movement of God in Jesus, creating, recreating and transforming, and inviting us to join in with the eternal dance and song of the Spirit which lies at the heart of God's love.

In the Methodist Church "Hush the Noise" Advent material we are invited to consider which secular love songs help us to understand Jesus' love, and the difference between human love, and God's unconditional love for us. One of my favourite songs is *Sky Full of Stars*", written by Chris Martin of Coldplay, supposedly after a midnight walk through Sydney on a starlit night. It's a wonderfully joyful song which was presumably written to/for a partner, but for me the lyrics hint at a deeper meaning: "*You're a sky full of stars*" and "*you get lighter the*

more it gets dark" could just as easily be used to describe God in Jesus, the Light of the world.

The idea of accepting God's invitation to walk – or dance – with him is particularly meaningful at this time of year. One poem often quoted is that used by George VI in his Christmas address in 1939 :

And 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 into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way." So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

God in Jesus invites us to join him in the divine dance, the eternal song of transforming love which still goes on.

I don't know whether you've made any New Year resolutions but it seems good to me to resolve to spend time reflecting on how we can be intentional in listening and looking for the song – and dance - of love that God in Jesus is inviting us to join in with – and commit ourselves to be part of it.

Amen.

Hymn:

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:
At Bethlehem I had My birth.

*'Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance,' said He,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance,' said He.*

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,
But they wouldn't dance and they wouldn't follow Me.
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John
They came with Me and the dance went on...

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung
Me on high,
And they left Me there on a cross to die....

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried My body and they thought I'd
gone,
But I am the dance, and I still go on.

They cut Me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die.
I'll live in you if you'll live in Me;
I am the Lord of the dance', said He.

Sydney Carter (1915-2004)

Prayers of Intercession

Loving Living God, tomorrow is Epiphany when
we remember the wise men journeying to find
you, and the gifts they brought.

As we think of **gold**, symbol of power and
influence, we thank you for the possessions and
money we have, and ask for your wisdom in
how we use and share them;

we pray for all who hold power over money
and finance whose decisions influence the lives
of others, that you will fill them with your spirit
of wisdom and compassion, so that their
decisions are motivated not by greed or
selfishness, but by justice and a desire to share
the world resources fairly and for the good of
all people;

we pray for those for whom money is a
burden, who are in debt or who can't afford
enough food, or heat

Lord of light: **Bring hope into the darkness.**

Loving God,

As we think of the **frankincense** the wise men
brought, we remember your call to holiness
and thank you for those who have helped us on
our spiritual journey;

we pray for all who faithfully pray for others,
and for those who speak your words of
holiness into our society,

we thank you for our church, the churches in
our communities and across the world,
and ask that you will give us all strength to walk
in your ways of truth and grace

Lord of light: **Bring hope into the darkness.**

Loving God, As we think of the gift of **myrrh**
that the wise men brought,
we thank you for the life, death and
resurrection of Jesus, and the freedom he has
given us to claim victory over death and evil
we pray for all those who are in distress and

pain just now, whether physical, emotional, or
spiritual;
we pray for those mourning the loss of loved
ones, or grieving for lost time or opportunities;
we pray for those who offer counselling &
support or simply a listening ear & a caring
heart;

Lord of light: **Bring hope into the darkness.**

And we pray for ourselves Lord;
help us, like the wise men, to continue to seek
your light and love, and to offer you our gifts
and resources so that you may use us to build
your kingdom.

We ask in the name of Jesus, your Word of
love and grace.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn (STF 330)

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.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!

Let all their songs employ;

While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains

Repeat the sounding joy,

Repeat the sounding joy,

Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,

And makes the nations prove

The glories of his righteousness

And wonders of his love.

And wonders of his love,

And wonders, and wonders of his love.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing, and the Word has
become flesh. So let's hush the noise, hear
them sing, and repeat the song.

And may the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and always. **Amen.**

*Rev Jane Wilson
December 2024*