

Cupar Old Parish Church

Where Everyone Matters

Newsletter 31 December 2021

Dear Friends:

We have made the decision for the eleven o'clock worship service to return to the Old Parish Centre during this period of enhanced restrictions. The morning service will remain in the hall only as long as we're expected to keep one-metre distance in worship.

Consequently, when you enter for worship at either service, please return to our previous practice of commencing with the second row, and filling in from west to east, leaving two chairs between each household or bubble.

Please **do not sit carelessly**, as it makes it difficult for those who follow to figure out what to do. Please use the first row if you have mobility, vision, or hearing impairment, or if you're running late.

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The transition from one year to the next can be a powerful mix of feelings--remembrance, gratitude, regret, and unresolved feelings for what was, or what might have been; and hope, excitement, dread, or dismay for what the new year might bring.

Given the year we've had, the new one might seem a bit daunting. But we are not required to take on at once all of the challenges that 2022 might bring; we're only called to meet each moment as it comes, and to allow Christ to live through us in each moment.

We won't always get it right, but there's always a fresh beginning waiting for us--and I don't mean waiting twelve months for 2023. Jesus is a God of new beginnings and fresh starts. Every moment is a new opportunity to let the light of Christ shine within us and through us.

With best wishes to you for the new year, and for each moment of the new year,
Jeff

PS Please note that I'm on holiday until 12 January. If you have a need, Jean Martin jeansmartin1968@gmail.com and Liz Nelson liznelson48@aol.com can direct you to the appropriate person.

From Our Prayer Team

Janice: janice.geddes2@btinternet.com

Please pray for the homeless at this time of year: that they find shelter, warmth and food. Please also pray for the food banks.

As this year comes to an end, let's reflect on our own lives and pray that in 2022 we can walk more closely with our Lord.

The prayer team continues to meet weekly through Zoom. If you have a prayer request, would like a member of the team to pray with you or would like to join us then please contact either Jeff Martin or Janice Geddes.

2 January: Worship at St John's 11:15am

Our friends at St John's and Dairsie United Parish have invited us to join them for worship this Sunday, at St John's. The service begins at 11:15am. There will not be any services at Cupar Old, morning or afternoon. You will be able to view a live-stream of the service at

<http://cuparstjohnsanddairsie.org/weekly-service-live-stream/>

9 January: Worship

Our regular diet of worship will resume on 9 January, with worship at 11:00am and 4:00pm. Both services will take place in the Old Parish Centre. Sunday Club will meet during the afternoon service.

Reflection from Peter Meager

Peter: meager52@btinternet.com

Her Majesty the Queen ended her address to the nation and Commonwealth last week with the carol, *O Little Town of Bethlehem* and quoted the lines, 'The hopes and fears of all the years of all the years are met in Thee tonight.' Our hearts went out to her as, with quiet dignity, she spoke of the recent loss of her husband, Prince Philip, but also of her confidence that there would be still be some joy as her family celebrated Christmas. Everything, she said, was underpinned by her Christian faith, based on the teachings of Jesus. She reminded us that His birth delivers the eternal message that in every human birth 'There is a new dawn with endless potential.'

We have already met the subject of this week's Bible passage as we thought about the Prophetess, Anna, last week. He was a contemporary of hers called Simeon. Professor Barclay describes him as belonging to a group known as 'the Quiet in the Land.' They were men and women who were waiting for God to fulfil the promises made by the Old Testament prophets, not by 'violence or the power of armies,' but by 'breaking directly into history by supernatural means.' (Commentary on Luke) They devoted themselves to prayer and worship in the hope and expectation that God would come as a second King David to '*comfort his people*' in Isaiah's words. (Isaiah 40)

Luke describes Simeon as being '*righteous and devout*' (verse 25). In a little book entitled *Windows on Christmas* Bill Crowder says that a righteous person, in the broader sense, is virtuous and keeps God's commands, while, in the narrower sense they deal appropriately and fairly with others. A devout person reveres God and allows that reverence to impact their life and choices. The phrase 'the consolation of Israel' was what we know as an *aka* (also known as) for the Messiah. Old people often get a bad press because they live in the past. Simeon, by contrast, was fixated on the future, anticipating the coming of God's promised deliverer. Next, says Luke, *the Holy Spirit was upon him*. This is fascinating as we tend to think of the Holy Spirit as only arriving after Easter, on the Day of Pentecost. Simeon had a foretaste of what a life can be like when God's Spirit permeates every pore of its being.

This indwelling of the Holy Spirit filled him with hope and optimism. In particular, he had been assured that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah with his own eyes. This hope had sustained God's people through hard, dark and uncertain days for generations. Now, as Simeon sees this family group making the offering of two pigeons, the gift designated for the

poor for thanksgiving for the birth of a child, the Spirit reveals to him that, '*the hopes and fears of all the years are met*' in this little child. He sees in this child the dawn of a new world with infinite potential. At long last, all his dreams come to pass; he sees his heart's desire; in the face of Jesus, he recognises the face of the saviour of the world.

What comes next is slightly bizarre. The aged seer approaches the family, takes the baby in his arms and, still being guided by the Holy Spirit, announces to all around what Mary and Joseph had been told by angels months before, that Jesus will be their salvation. (verse 30) Simeon experiences an overwhelming sense of fulfilment and contentment as he holds the baby. So much so that the words of one of the first Christian hymns flow spontaneously from his lips. In some traditions it is still sung every week in what came to be known as the 'Nunc dimittis' from its opening words in Latin; 'Now let your servant depart in peace.' Simeon had actually looked into the face of God and experienced a fulness of life and satisfaction of heart that far surpassed anything he could have anticipated.

Crowder says, 'Mary and Joseph had already witnessed amazing things - angels, shepherds, the star over Bethlehem. Now, added to that was the prophetic praise of a total stranger who proclaimed that his life was complete because he had seen their son. They could only stand there in amazement *at what was said about him* (verse 33). What a fantastic scene it must have been that day in the temple as Mary and Joseph watched a completely contented man do the most meaningful thing he would ever do – celebrate Jesus. There is more in this passage, but I will leave it there for the moment.

We look again into that blessed face and can experience the contentment of being at one with him. As we enter this new year, that is very important since we are well aware of all the uncertainties that still may lie before us. Thinking of that, I am reminded of another Christmas Day speech; the one given by the Queen's father, George VI in 1939. He quoted some lines from a poem by a lady called Minnie Haskins, who wrote:

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.
And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

Bible Reading: Luke 2:21-35

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons'. Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.' The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Here is a contemporary version of the Song of Simeon from the Lutheran Church in Australia: <https://youtu.be/SWvocVoe1L4>

A prayer inspired by our Lord's presentation in the temple:

*O God our Father, help us to express our religion, not in outward rituals, ceremonies and conventions, but in the inner devotion of our hearts and in the true and ungrudging service of you and humankind.
Save us from being religious in church while, at the same time, being cross, ill-tempered, moody or difficult to live with at home.
Save us from being meticulous in Bible study and in prayer while being slack, careless or inefficient in our work.*

Save us from going through the motions of religion on Sunday while being self-centred, bitter, unforgiving, intolerant, proud or careless of the needs or feelings of others on Monday.

So cleanse us that not only our outward actions but also the inmost thoughts of our hearts may be pure.

And now may the Light of God make us unafraid,

The Power of God protect us,

And the Grace of God bless us and keep us truthful, now and always. Amen

(The italicised parts of this prayer come from 'Prayers for the Christian Year' by Professor William Barclay – very slightly modified)