

Gathering of God's People

Time when we greet one another and prepare for worship.

Those who are able please stand for the entry of the Bible.

Words of welcome and announcements.

Good morning! How are you?

Let me introduce you to Peter Kotze. He just finished his theological studies in South Africa and is now expecting to be called into a charge or congregation. It is a time where he learn more of the Scottish culture, the Scottish church and the church practise. South Africa is slowly but surely slipping into a post secular society and he is going to get invaluable training!

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: All over the world a voice is heard:

All: 'Prepare the way, prepare for change.'
In quiet villages and busy towns, in bustling
cities and desert spaces, a voice is heard:

All: 'Prepare the way, prepare for change.'

MP 393

Joy to the world

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

"My heart is glad and my soul rejoices; Because God shows me the path of life,
And in his presence is fullness of joy." Let us pray:

Patient God, when in the heat of the moment we have spoken words we now
regret:

forgive us.

When in the business of our day,
we fail to see that someone is waiting for a word from us:

forgive us.

When we miss the opportunity to speak out against
injustice and hatred:

forgive us.

When apathy and indifference close our eyes to those
struggling in wilderness places:

forgive us.

Forgive us and fill us with your compassion and energy
to speak your word of love and hope to a world in need,
for now is the time.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

ALL: 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever.
Amen.

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 1:67-80 (NT page 1027)

Reader: Carol Coull

Background & Reflection

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us
from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to
guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Our reading follows on after John the Baptist was born and after his name
ceremony was completed.

Zechariah's prophetic song, known as the 'Benedictus' is similar to Mary's in its
general sentiments and Jewish character. He uses Old Testament language to
express how God is worthy of praise because he has now acted in accordance with
his promises to deliver his people through the coming of a descendant of David. He
is singing about the impending birth of the Messiah. He refers back to the covenant
that God made with Abraham and all his descendants.

From verses 76–79 the song changes its form and becomes an address to his newly
born child John - he will act as a prophet and prepare the way of the Lord by
assuring the people of forgiveness of their sins. When he speaks about the Messiah
he refers to Him as the *rising sun* which is an allusion to Malagai 4:2 although the
Greek word *anatolē* might be a translation of the Hebrew word for 'shoot' or
'branch' which is a title for the Messiah in some passages in the Old Testament.

The messiah will shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.
This picks up the image of “the rising sun” in the previous verse and is again

borrowed from passages in the Old Testament. **The messiah will guide their feet into the path [way] of peace which is again in line with the general expectancy of what He will do.**

The story of John's birth is completed with a brief note of his upbringing and his period in the desert. The desert was the expected place for a new exodus and thus for the Messiah. In Jesus' time some groups, seeking greater purity, withdrew from common Judaism into the desert. Whether John may have studied among such groups for a time is debated, although it is probable if his aged parents died before he reached maturity.

For Luke the coming of Christ clearly did not bring the creation of a new religion but the fulfillment of the covenantal promises God made to the prophets of the OT.

What is the meaning of our reading to us living today?

I think our reading emphasises again the sacrifice God made on our behalf. God made a covenant with Abraham and all his descendants but no human being, not Abraham or any of his descendants could keep their end of the "bargain". If God kept to His part, he could have deserted the human race altogether. He was faithful while they were unfaithful. He had to rescue them time and time again while they wandered off. If our relationship with God depended on us, there would be no relationship, for we tend to run and hide from God. But God decided to make Himself vulnerable, by coming as a baby to this world to redeem the human race' sins so that they can have a relationship with Him. He confirmed through the birth of Jesus that He wants to be our God, and that He wants us to be his people. All we need is faith, hope and love – faith that trusts unconditionally, hope that reaches beyond this earth and love that can move mountains and change attitudes.

The birth of Jesus must remind us that God is faithful to His promises. It must help us to understand that God has His own time and that He will answer our prayers according to His will and time. We must be patient and rejoice in all the times where we have experienced how the darkest situation turns eventually in the lightest of day, where God through time even changes the shadow of death into the dawn of a new day, and where there is hatred that He makes us all peacemakers! I heard this week of a man who always said: "It is so nice to be nice....." Maybe we must be also try to be nice and kind and loving to other people, be peacemakers wherever we go. Why? Well Jesus brought peace and harmony to this world – if we are his followers we need to follow suit.

Our reading this morning is so relevant for us all this Christmas when we do think of all our loved ones that has gone before us. God is reminding us of a new heaven and a new earth. He is telling us that Christ is indeed like the sun shining on all of us living in darkness and in the shadow of death. He will guide our feet into the path of peace.

May we pray a work for peace while we know right at this moment innocent children and women and men are dying because of conflict, and war!

Amen

MP 589 See Him lying on a bed of straw

Contemporary lesson – Peter Kotze

Responding to God's word

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing MP 51:1,2,3 "Be Thou my vision".

Prayer of thanksgiving: Cicely Abraham

MP 47 Away in a manger

Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace

May the road you travel be smooth and straight;
every ditch filled in, every bump and rut smoothed out;
any diversion easy to navigate
and may good companions share your journey.
And The blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Be with you all
Now and for evermore

Sung Amen