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Worship
January 3, 2021

(To watch the videotaped version of the worship service, click the link below)

<https://youtu.be/Oe2d7kugIZM>

GATHERING

GREETING & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

OPENING HYMN "What Child Is This"

CALL TO WORSHIP

Worship is a time to learn the ways of God.

As God's love is genuine, may our love toward one another be authentic.

Worship is a time to be caught up in the Spirit of God.

We call upon God to instill within us a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and hope.

Worship is a time to nurture peacefulness within and among ourselves.

We pray for a humbleness of heart and a willingness to forgive and receive forgiveness.

May this time of worship nurture us in the ways of God.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

If we say we have no sin, if we believe we are not broken; we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

We trust that your mercy is our forgiveness, your compassion our healing.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

We live in the power of a forgiving God.

We live in the presence of Jesus the Christ ... we are forgiven, thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE "Angels We Have Heard on High"

GREETING

The Lord be with you

Be filled with the spirit of God today.

We worship to open our hearts for God's blessing.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading

Jeremiah 31:7-14

For thus says the LORD:

**Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
'Save, O LORD, your people,
the remnant of Israel.'**

**See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labour, together;
a great company, they shall return here.**

**With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.**

**Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.'**

**For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.
They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.**

**Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.**

I will turn their mourning into joy,

I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

I will give the priests their fill of fatness,

and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

Second Reading

Psalm 147:12-20

Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.
He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?
He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the LORD!

PSALM RESPONSE *“Lord, Every Nation”*

Lord, every Nation on earth will adore you, O God.

Lord, every Nation on earth will adore you.”

GOSPEL READING

John 1:1-18

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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

SERMON

2nd Sunday after Christmas, Jan. 3, 2021. "New Beginnings" Bethany

In a little corner of a city in a faraway land, a small group of people gathered. The priest watched them as they shuffled into the house. He had long been practicing the art of reading their feelings by looking into their eyes. He saw the same painful questions that he had long seen. And he knew that the questions were there even if unasked, but the answers to those questions would be either a hanging on to their faith—or a loss of their faith forever...and at that point all they had was their faith. "Why did this happen to us?" they wanted to know. "We were God's people! We lived in God's land. We worshiped in the Temple. How could this happen to us?!" The priest remembered that day—that awful day when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians—the deaths—the fires—the horror. And his own sense of relief when he and his family were deported to Babylon rather than being killed. He remembered words that were spoken that day—words spoken by an old woman; words that spoke of hopelessness—of despair—she dared to ask the question that he only dared to think: Does God really care—does God even exist. If you why did this happen to us?!

That night as he stood to speak to his small congregation he began: "Friends, we all feel the same. We feel our lost is not only the loss of our homes, but also that the Babylonian gods defeated God. We wonder where is God and what is he doing? We remember better days back home and fear over the chaos of our lives now. I pray that these words will give the hope that I have found in them.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the waters.

"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good"

"These words remind us that God has been in control since the beginning. If he has given the world its beginning, surely, he can give his people a new beginning. If he has brought light into the chaos of darkness, surely he will bring light into the chaos and darkness that now overshadows our lives."

In another city some six hundred years later, another small band of people gathered for worship. These were some of the earliest Christians. Times were tough. They had been expelled from the synagogue and it meant for them separation from friends and loved ones—it meant facing persecution at the hands of the Empire. Yet they still came to worship. The preacher knew that they need to hear the good news—and they needed to know that God cared for them and would walk with them even in the dark times that seemed to overshadow them.

The preacher took a deep breath, voiced a prayer, and began to read: “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 anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of humanity—and the darkness has not overcome it.”

And they remembered that they had that light and life through Jesus Christ—that they also have a new beginning—a new hope—a new life in the one who is the light of world. Now it is another time—another time—and yet in the midst of pandemic; of chaos and uncertainty; of division and hate; distrust; and fear, we gather around our computers to worship together. Again, we come together with numerous questions: why is all of this happening? Where is our Lord when we need him so desperately? Has God abandoned us? All of this that is taking place may shake our faith. Is that you? There may be a few of us who feel the depth of darkness overshadowing the light that Christ has brought to us. There may be some of us who dare to ask the question, Is God really in Control?

Yes, this is our time, our place, our fears, our questions our frustrations, yet the answer is the same as it was in Babylon; in Judea; and in a thousand other places when darkness and chaos seem to rule: In the beginning—in the beginning God was in control. And God is still in control of all things. It is God who brings us to new beginnings in spite of the darkness and the chaos of the world around us. Throughout your life, have you not felt the movement of the Spirit that has enabled you to have a new beginning to your lived? Have there not been times of darkness in your life, when unexpectedly light comes into your life and your life is changed forever. And looking back at that time, you realize that the quiet Spirit of God was at work in your life? Now in this time for us to hear again these words that begin the Gospel of St. John: “In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; and all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of humanity...and the darkness did not overcome it.” Even in spite of the darkness God is in control and the light will overcome the darkness. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY “*Christ Our Light Has Come*”

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

*We believe in God,
Creator of the universe,
Giver of every good gift,
Author of life itself.*

*We believe in Jesus Christ,
who reminded us of the coming of God's kingdom,
who commanded us to care for those in need,
who taught us to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth,
and who gave us the example of self-giving love.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who inspires us to faithful stewardship of God's gifts and
that God has given us gifts to be shared freely and generously, in a spirit of love and joy.
We believe that faithful stewardship is an act of worship,
a means of praising God who has blessed us abundantly.
We believe that God has great things in store for us,
for it is in giving that we receive. AMEN*

(Allen & Sara Ewing-Merrill, 2004)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless our lives, lead us in your ways, gives us hearts for gratitude and service. Fill us with your grace, that what we desire is also what you desire. Grant us the understanding that our hearts' true desire is the love of you. May the love of Christ urge us on, may we walk by faith. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless those who govern. Bless the leaders of nations, countries, towns, and cities. Bless all those who lead in all manner of ways – social, political, and religious. Fill the hearts of all with your wisdom. Guide us in the way of justice and integrity for all. Guide us to walk by faith. Holy God, tend to those who suffer in mind, body, and spirit. Tend to the tired, the dying, the poor and the hungry. Help us to follow the love of Christ, a love which urges us on to seek and serve Christ in others. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... We pray for Bethany members on our prayer list. Give them the blessing of your presence amid their times of trial. We pray for our congregation in this time of suspended worship that we will still continue to be a committed community of faith seeking to be the light of Jesus in our community and world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... We pray for our world in a time of pandemic and societal distress and change. Give our leaders wisdom, compassion, insight, and courage to lead in ways that serve all the people under their charge. We pray for doctors and nurses, EMT's, and all those on the frontline of healthcare amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Give them health, energy, compassion, and the strength to care for those struggling with illness and hospitalization. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING *(Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)*

PRAYER OF BLESSING

God of all blessing, giver of all good gifts; day by day you shower us with what we need to live and prosper. With glad and generous hearts and in a response of thanksgiving, we return a portion of our wealth. May what we give be a symbol of our gratitude and a blessing of your love for those who may be helped through our offering. AMEN

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory, forever and ever. AMEN.

SENDING

Benediction

People of God, look for Jesus!

Seek him as a treasure in this great wide world.

Seek him in the eyes of your loved ones and in the eyes of strangers.

May your heart burn within you as the Lord draws close to you this week.

CLOSING HYMN *"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"*

DISMISSAL

P *Go in peace to live and serve in the way of the cross.*

C *Thanks be to God!*