

## **BASINGSTOKE AND READING CIRCUIT WORSHIP FOR 13 DECEMBER 2020**

prepared by Revd. David Jenkins

### **Call to Worship**

Welcome to worship today. With people from across the Circuit we come to meet with, to learn from, and to more effectively live with the living God,

### **Hymn 186 Singing the Faith; 86 Hymns and Psalms "Tell out my soul"**

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;  
his holy name-the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;  
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!  
(Timothy Dudley Smith)

### **Prayers**

You are God, in the furthest reaches of the universe and in the depths of our own being.  
Receive our worship this day.

Thank you for your presence in every part of this last week. Thank you for every kindness we've received and for all we've glimpsed of the wonder and richness of life.

We offer to our regrets for how we've sometimes thought and spoken and acted this week -in ways that do not reflect the maturity and wisdom and integrity that we receive from relationship with you. Forgive the selfishness which limits our loving, the negativity which limits our hoping, and the fears which limit our faith.

We ask that your understanding and forgiveness will enable us to live more closely the life to which you call us in Jesus our Lord. Amen.

### **Story: Ivor's Christmas Gift**

Ivor was a carpenter. One Christmas he wanted to carve the best piece of work he'd ever done. He'd heard that a prince had been born at the castle. He thought he'd give his carving to the prince as a gift.

Slowly a beautiful horse began to take shape. Ivor was so engrossed in his work that he often forgot to eat and he almost forgot to sleep. He sang as he worked.

One day a poor young orphan boy came begging at Ivor's door. He knocked three times but Ivor didn't hear him-he was so busy making his horse. The boy pushed the door open and went inside. He gasped.

"Gosh" he said.

"What is it?" asked Ivor. "Who are you and how did you get in?"

"It's great", said the boy. "I've never seen anything like it."

Ivor smiled. He put his chisel down and looked at the pale, thin boy. "Thank you", he said. "It's a rocking horse I'm making for the new prince. Now what can I do for you?"

For a moment the boy hesitated. All thoughts of food, money, time to get warmed-the things he usually asked for-went out of his head as he looked at the wonderful carved horse.

"Will you make me something, please?" whispered the boy.

"Here, sit down by the fire", said Ivor.

When the boy had sat down Ivor gave him a hot drink and something to eat. Then he picked up his tools and a small piece of wood. The boy watched, fascinated, as Ivor carved a tiny wooden horse.

"There", said Ivor, "take this little horse for yourself."

The boy thanked Ivor and his little horse clutched tightly in his hand he shuffled back into the cold. Ivor went back to working on the rocking horse.

The days passed by quickly and soon it was Christmas Eve.

"Now to deliver my present to the prince", thought Ivor. He looked at the result of his hours and hours of work. It stood like a real horse. Ivor carefully loaded it onto his cart and wrapped it in blankets to protect it. Then he set off for the palace. It took him half a day to walk to the palace, dragging the cart over the snowy forest tracks but at last Ivor arrived at the gates. He rang a bell at the gate and a metal grille opened. A face looked out and demanded, "What do you want?"

"I've come to bring a present for the prince", answered Ivor.

"Why should the prince want anything from you? Be off with you", snarled the guard.

Just then there was a clatter of hooves and Ivor saw the Queen's coach. She had the baby prince in her arms, and Ivor went towards the coach to give them his present. But the coachman told Ivor to get out of his way and he hit Ivor with his whip. Ivor fell backwards into a snow-filled ditch.

"Why did they do that?" Ivor muttered. Then he noticed that he wasn't alone in the ditch.

Another body lay there almost covered by snow. It was thin and pale and clutched in its hand was a small wooden horse. Ivor tenderly wiped the snow from the boy's face and carefully lifted him out of the ditch. Then he gently put the boy on his cart, wrapped him in the blankets that went around the rocking horse and set off back to his cottage.

It was dark when Ivor got home. He put the boy in his own comfortable bed and then lit the fire. When the fire was blazing, he boiled a large tin bath of water and carried it over to the bed. He took off the boy's tattered clothes and washed him with the hot water. Then he wrapped him warmly in some old thick shirts he had.

By now it was dawn and Ivor went outside to the cart, took down the rocking horse and carried it back into the cottage. He put it at the foot of the bed and began to make a drink to give to the boy when he would wake up. For a second or two he must have dozed because he was suddenly awakened by the sound of bells ringing.

"It's Christmas!" he said to himself and smiled. Then, when he turned, he saw that the boy's eyes were open.

"Am I in heaven?" asked a small voice.

"Why do you ask?" said Ivor.

"Because I can't remember when I was so warm before", said the boy, "and I've still got my horse". He held up a small hand, still clutching the tiny horse Ivor had made for him.

Ivor smiled. "You're not in heaven-but you've come home, and ", he nodded to the foot of the bed, "you've got two horses".

### **Reading Isaiah 9: 2b-7**

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

<sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

<sup>4</sup>For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

<sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onwards and for evermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

### **Reading 1 John 1: 1-10**

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— <sup>2</sup>this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— <sup>3</sup>we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>We are writing these things so that our\* joy may be complete.

<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

## Hymn 178 Singing the Faith: 83 Hymns and Psalms "Long ago prophets knew"

Long ago, prophets knew  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
come to make all things new;  
bear his people's burden,  
freely love and pardon.

*Refrain:*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he comes,*  
*when he comes,*  
*who will make him welcome?*

God in time, God in man,  
this is God's timeless plan:  
He will come, as a man,  
born himself of woman,

*Refrain:*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he comes,*  
*when he comes,*  
*who will make him welcome?*

Mary hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb, God is laid:  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected,

*Refrain:*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he comes,*  
*when he comes,*  
*who will make him welcome?*

Journey ends! Where afar  
Bethlehem shines, like a star,  
stable door stands ajar.  
unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour, do not tarry!

*Refrain:*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*Jesus comes!*  
*Jesus comes!*  
*We will make him welcome!*

(Fred Pratt Green)

## **Sermon "Navigating the Voyage"**

Have you ever met a famous person?

On one occasion a member of a church where I was a Minister said, "Come and meet my uncle who is in the congregation today-Sir Alec Rose". Sir Alec Rose-one of the people who had sailed around the world single-handedly.

What would it be like- to find your way across the world's oceans towards a safe harbour?

You'd have one clear purpose in mind-but how many times might you have to alter your plans in order to negotiate your way through reefs and rocks, shallows and deeps?

Even a whole fleet of ships may have to change their route.

This is a transcript of a radio conversation in October 1995 between the British authorities and a US Navy ship near the coast of England.

British: "Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision"

US Navy: "Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision."

British: "Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision".

US Navy: "This is the Captain of US Navy Ship. I say again, divert YOUR course."

British: "Negative. I say again, you will have to divert your course."

US Navy: "This is the Aircraft Carrier USS Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States' Atlantic Fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north, or counter measures will be taken to ensure the safety of this ship."

British: "We are a lighthouse.

It's your call."

There are times when, whatever we have planned, those plans may need to be changed!

I think we are all aware of how plans need to change! Whatever plans you had for 2020 are likely to have changed dramatically-the places you didn't go to; the people you didn't meet; the holidays you didn't have; the events you celebrated in a muted way; the considerable changes to the ways in which we worshipped.

The good ship SS Basingstoke and Reading Circuit has had to alter course many times; so has our nation, and all the nations of the world. One thing you can say about 2020 -it hasn't been predictable!

On this uncertain voyage there are many aids to navigation that we need-compasses, sextants, the equivalent of nautical sat navs. If we get too close to danger, we will need lighthouses. And it's helpful to know that we don't sail these seas alone. The guidance of Jesus, Light of the World, the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit and the overarching direction of the Father are always available to us. "Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea; guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee."

The people who have sailed round the world single-handedly have needed considerable inner resources-determination, resilience, patience; perseverance; flexibility. And it's qualities like those we need for our life's voyage-especially during all the disappointments, challenges and limitations of a year like this one.

One of the definitions of intelligence is the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, as animals and people have been learning to do for thousands of years.

Cardinal John Henry Newman, canonised as a Catholic Saint in 2019, once said "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often". This is the kind of adaptability that has enabled people to make major adjustments in their lives. Think of some of the immense changes people aged 100 + have seen in their lifetimes, and how pliable they have needed to be to live through "the changes and chances of this fleeting world."

This voyage needs not only resilience and adaptability, but a deep courage and a real sense of purpose.

There is a destination to be reached -not only for ourselves but for all humanity.

There is a clear direction for life, which is about always moving on, always growing, always developing, never staying in one place, not content with remaining moored in the same harbour.

Sir Francis Drake is believed to be the first person to have circumnavigated the globe. This prayer is attributed to him:-

"Disturb us, Lord, when  
We are too well pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true  
Because we have dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely  
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when  
With the abundance of things we possess  
We have lost our thirst  
For the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life,  
We have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision  
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wider seas  
Where storms will show your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land,  
We shall find the stars.

We ask You to push back  
The horizons of our hopes;  
And to push into the future  
In strength, courage, hope, and love."

In the letter to the Hebrews Jesus is described as "the author and finisher of the faith". In the book of Revelation he is called "the Alpha and the Omega-the beginning and the end." He is the source of our life and its goal. He stimulated us when we set out on our voyage; he will be there to welcome us when we reach our destination. And more than that-he accompanies us on our life's journey. This journey of learning and living out the love of God will involve us in moving along the sea lanes of justice, of compassion, of integrity.

And in embarking on this voyage, not only do we move closer to God, we actually become more like God.

One of the early Fathers of the Christian Church, Athanasius, is credited with saying of God coming to us in Jesus - "He became what we are in order that we might become what he is."

The God we follow acts as a model of flexible perseverance, of patient purpose, of adaptability to achieve God's great purpose.

In all the accounts of the Nativity of Jesus, while still allowing people freedom of thought and decision, God endeavours to weave that purpose, and to see it through, despite all obstacles in the way. God the Sea Captain is navigating the ship through very rocky and dangerous waters.

For example Joseph is thinking of breaking off his engagement with Mary; a census takes place, involving upheaval for many people; on arrival in Bethlehem there is no suitable accommodation for the young couple and no safe place for the birth of the child; the Magi's inquiry sets Herod off in a direction that will lead to infanticide and could have included the baby Jesus.

I don't go with the thought that this was all planned by God down to the last detail. I do believe that God had one clear overarching purpose in bringing the child Jesus into the world, and that this purpose is realised in Jesus being the Saviour of the world; but I don't believe in a puppet-master God manipulating all events and overriding all human decision-making.

I believe that God acted then, as God acts now, reacting with great flexibility and skill in steering the ship through all navigational hazards that present themselves.

So God helps to give Joseph the reassurance he needs to overcome any fears and doubts he has about Mary; God doesn't let the census spoil what God intended, but works with it, especially because it results in Jesus being born in Bethlehem; God helps the people involved to find a solution to the problem of there being no room in the inn; and God finds ways of communicating with the Magi and with Joseph so that the child gets to a place of safety.

I believe that this is the God we encounter throughout our lives -not always smoothing the way for us; certainly not making our decisions for us; but acting with us, offering us guidance, if we'll see it and take it; strengthening us for the immense voyage of faith to which God calls us.

One of my favourite poets is Walt Whitman, and especially when his poetry is set to Vaughan Williams' music in "A Sea Symphony". The thought of life as a vast voyage of faith pervades the whole work. Here are some of its words:-

"Behold, the sea itself, and on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships.  
We too take ship, O Soul. Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas. Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail, Singing our song of God. Bathe me, O God, in thee, O thou transcendent, Nameless, the fibre and the breath, Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them, greater than stars or suns. Sail forth-steer for the deep waters only. Reckless, O Soul, exploring, I with thee and thou with me, for we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go, and we will risk the ship, ourselves and all. O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?"

Let us hoist the anchor and cast off, flexibly and patiently navigating the seas of God, whatever changes and chances we face in the years of our life, sailing to the destination to which we are called in the presence of the Master Mariner who has entered our life in Jesus Christ our living Lord.

### Prayer

Let us reflect on what we've heard and respond to it. We are quiet before God....

We offer our love and prayer for the people for whom we are especially concerned..

for people in need -

of food.....

of water.....

of welcome.....

of shelter.....

of healing.....

of care.....

May the transforming love of God impact upon their situations...

We offer ourselves, that your purposes for our lives may move closer towards fulfilment.....

We pray for the renewing of our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord, 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, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **[Hymn 346 Singing the Faith; 455 Hymns and Psalms "Christ is the world's light"](#)**

Christ is the world's Light, he and no other;  
born in our darkness, he became our brother.  
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:  
glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Peace, he and no other;  
no man can serve him and despise his brother  
who else unites us, one in God the Father?  
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's Life, he and no other;  
sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother -  
he who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:  
Glory to God on high.

Give God the glory, God and no other;  
give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;  
give God the glory, God in man my brother:  
glory to God on high.

(Fred Pratt Green)

### **Benediction**

May the strength of God pilot us  
May the wisdom of God instruct us  
and may the power of God defend us, now and evermore. Amen.