

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord God, You have given us the priceless gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, and through Him, You have shown us Your essential characteristics of love, forgiveness, kindness, and peace. In the world, people tend to give little value to these qualities, but they are wrong. The baby born in Bethlehem has shown in His life and death that they are the most precious of gifts. Thank You Lord God, for revealing them to us in Jesus. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: ACTION

1. For yourself

What do you plan to do with your new Year? Pray about this and set before the Lord your own thoughts and feelings, and prayerfully seek the Lord's guidance on these, your plans

2. For your friends and family

Pray for any of your family who has specific needs, and pray for the courage to help, if this is needed

3. For the church and its work

Pray for any plans the church may have for the coming year, whether they are building plans or plans for spiritual growth and anything in between. Lift these things up to the Lord in prayer and look for the opportunity to contribute to the church's efforts

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for those who work for your government, that is, from civil servants to council workers, and everyone in between. May they do the work required of them for the good of all

Meditation

O Lord my God, take my life;
And make it useful in Your Kingdom.

Take what I think is wonderful,
And reveal its true worth by Your bright light.

Take what I think has little use,
And transform it into what is valuable.

Take my gifts and graces,
And apply them to Your greater purposes.

Take my sins and transgressions,
And exercise Your judgement over them.

Take everything I do with my time,
And redeem it by Your glorious presence.

Take all I fail to do each day
And encourage me to trust in Your wisdom.

O Lord my God, take my life;
And by Your Holy Spirit, make me anew.

Bible Study

Bible passage – John 1:10-14

¹⁰ He was in the world, and through Him the world came into being; yet the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to what was His own, and His own people did not accept Him. ¹² However, to those who did receive Him and believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God, ¹³ which means those who were born not of natural descent or human will, but born of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory which comes uniquely from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Review

Within this text, scripture describes for us one of the greatest mysteries of all; the coming of God into the world as a baby. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke attempt to describe and explain the birth of Jesus, but John does not describe it. John simply reports Jesus' coming, seeking to explain something about it; '*He was in the world ... yet the world did not know Him*' (1:10). John is so intrigued by this that he does not even talk about the baby's name or describe the circumstances of His birth; those details we find within the other Gospels, which form the basis of a million nativity plays across the world. The birth of a child is always a profound mystery of creation, but this birth is utterly unique because God creates not merely another human being within the womb of a mother, but Himself within the womb of Mary. Jesus is born '*not of ... human will, but ... of God*' (1:13).

This entire passage contains some of the most extraordinary and profound words ever written about the coming of God into the world in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Christmas season is a wonderful season worthy of our fullest celebration, worship and festivity. It focuses on the story of the birth of Jesus, but we need more than the story. We need to know about how God was at work in the world through this astounding event, and how His Son came to be the 'Word', and 'Light' of the world.

The truth about Jesus is not accepted all, but only those who believe in Him. The church of God's people carries this truth through history by the power of His Spirit, but it was established after Jesus' death, so there was a time when this Good News was hidden from the world. The prophets had told the Jewish people beforehand about the coming of God's Messiah, but they struggled to accept what they had been told, at least 'officially'. So, Jesus was 'in the world ... yet the world did not know Him' (1:10). The tragedy of His rejection by the very people He came to serve, His own race, is almost too much to understand; but we could not claim to be better ourselves. We, too, look for Jesus in stories rather than face the truth about what His coming means!

The world has always found it hard to accept that Jesus was truly God. Some say that it would be easier to decide if Jesus had come and said 'I am God', but we know this would be mere showmanship. Jesus came to prove Himself to us by what He said and did, and we are left to decide for ourselves what we make of Him. John Himself says at the end of his Gospel, '*these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*' (20:31). In order to start our assessment of God's work in Jesus, John points us to the miracle of His birth (1:13), and the fact that He came to give people the gift of life, a gift from the loving heart of God (1:12). God Himself became '*flesh, and dwelt among us ...*' (1:14)

Lastly, John identifies the nature of the basic choice we face when we hear about the birth of Jesus and the coming of God into the world. We either reject Him or we may accept Him. This seems obvious to say, but as John sets this out for us, the stark contrast raises this choice to the level of the highest of stakes; '*He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him ... to those who did receive Him and believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God*' (1:12).

We leave this passage with the wonderful testimony of those who first knew Jesus and accepted the truth God had given them through Jesus, after several years of staying close to Him and hearing His teaching, and after Jesus' own death and resurrection. They knew that in this brief period of their lives, they had '*seen His glory, the glory that comes uniquely from the Father, full of grace and truth*' (1:14). John and the other disciples bore this testimony and they knew that the message they bore would change the world .

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What have you learned new about Christmas this year, either from this passage or in a service of worship, or in any other way?
2. How can we best celebrate the Good News at Christmas time? Do people want to hear the Gospel at Christmas during the story of the nativity?

3. How may we best pass on the spiritual heritage of faith we have received, especially the news of Christ's coming at Christmas?

Discipleship challenges

- *Consider for a few moments whether you feel able to speak to people about the Gospel this Christmas. Can you celebrate Christ's coming to earth by telling another person that this story of Jesus is the truth; moreover, it is not just that the nativity story is true, but it is true that God has indeed come, in Jesus.*
 - *Do your best to bless all those you meet, by your manner and the graciousness of your speech and the quality of what you do.*
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Final Prayer

I offer You my praise, Lord Jesus. You are God, and You have made Him real to me. Without You, I would not know God, I would not know truth, and I would not know that I can have a relationship with the one and only God who has made the world. Alleluia! AMEN
