



Opening Prayer

“Come thou long expected Jesus.” Come to us Lord, where we are, however we are feeling, whatever is going on in our lives. As you come to us, Lord Jesus, help us to reach out to you and to receive from you. Amen.

Hymn: StF 169 Come Thou Long Expected Jesus *Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVI33j--eT8>

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Let us pray together

As Mary sang, may our souls glorify you, oh Lord; may our spirits rejoice in you.

We celebrate all the great things you have done throughout time but we also remember the simple things that you do for each of us personally.

We thank you for the friends who encourage us, the unexpected phone call, the beauty of the natural world. We thank you that you reach out to us whatever we might be doing and however we might be feeling. You stand watching, waiting, ready to intervene at just the right time and in just the right way.

We thank you, Mighty God, for all you have done for us and continue to do for us. Amen.

Today's Reading from the Old Testament: Micah 5 vv 2-5a

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 1 vv 39-55 visit of Mary

Hymn StF 405 Great is the Darkness *Marty Haugen*

Great is the darkness that covers the earth;
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
touched by the madness and lies.

May now your church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim.
In every nation salvation will come,
To those who believe in your name.
Help us bring light to this world
that we might speed your return

*Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus,
Pour out your spirit we pray.
Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus,
Pour out your spirit on us today.*

Great celebrations on that final day,
When out of the heavens you come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end,
And rulers will bow at your throne.
Our great commission complete,
then face to face we shall meet.

Time to Reflect

I can always remember the day that Karen and I discovered that we were having our first baby, from very early on in our relationship we had wanted children and we both wanted a big family, so on that day back in 1987, the news was exciting. I went into work the day after and waited for the moment that I could casually drop my good news into the conversation, without making a fool of myself and the opportunity never created itself and I came home that night, still bursting with excitement, but having not shared my news. The following day, I decided that the world needed to know our good news, so at the first opportunity I simply said, "Karen's pregnant" and it felt so good sharing the news. Time and again over the years I have come home, longing to tell Karen some good news, despite both my parents being dead for over thirty years, there are still times when I long to share good news with them.

I love Mary's reaction to the good news of her pregnancy. I can imagine Mary being scared at the prospect of what lay ahead, she was a young girl, a virgin, unmarried and this was never going to be a typical pregnancy and I can imagine the thoughts that must have tormented her. Even so, her immediate reaction is to go to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth in the hill country to tell her good news. The baby in Elizabeth's womb reacts to the news, Elizabeth appears to be one of the first Christian believers and Mary reacts by reciting the passage that we now refer to as the Magnificat.

Consider:

- *When you have good news to share in your own life, who is the first person you turn to?*
- *How do you express your joyful response to good news? Do you dance, sing, shout, get excited? Or are you far more reserved than that, and feel that it is more important to retain dignity at all times?*
- *Can you think of occasions when you have longed to share good news and you believe that people won't be interested, or the person you want to share with isn't around anymore? How do you deal with this?*

A time of prayer

Spend a moment thinking about the season. Perhaps this is a joyful time for you but, perhaps, it brings up hard memories and other challenges. As you reflect on these things, offer them to God.

Lord, we recall how Elizabeth and Mary supported one another. We thank you for the support that we have received from other people and pray that we might see opportunities to help and support others. Then, for those things that we can't do, we place those people and situations into your caring hands.

Lord, we recall how you came to a forgotten backwater and bring to mind those in our society who are forgotten or marginalized. We pray that governments and individuals will be alert to those needs and will take action. Help us not to turn blind eyes on those in need.

Lord, we recall that Mary recognized how you were blessing her even though things would not have been easy. We reach out to receive your blessings for ourselves but also remember those who are not in a place to do that for themselves. Send your blessings Lord. Amen. **Our Father**

Hymn: StF 330 Joy to the World

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZhgp97y7Q>

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains

repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

A prayer of blessing

The Lord will stand and feed his flock and they will live secure in his strength;
for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth and he shall be the one of peace. *(Based on Micah 5 vv 4-5)*
May we receive all that God has for us and go forth in his peace.