



**Call to Worship:** Psalm 95:1-7

**Hymn 83 (STF)**

Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven;  
To his feet thy tribute bring.  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like thee his praise should sing?  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour  
To his people in distress;  
Praise him, still the same for ever,  
Slow to chide and swift to bless.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame he knows;  
In his hands he gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Widely as his mercy flows.

Angels in the height, adore him;  
Ye behold him face to face;  
Sun and moon, bow down before him,  
Dwellers all in time and space.  
Praise him! Praise him!  
Praise with us the God of grace!

**A Prayer of Adoration and Praise**

Eternal Father, whose son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord. Keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace. Bring the whole created order to worship at his feet, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and for ever. Amen. A Prayer of Confession For all the times we have placed self-interest over the care of others, Lord have mercy. When we have misused authority and power, Christ have mercy for everything we do that depletes our environment and weakens biodiversity, Lord have mercy. Amen.

**Bible Reading:** Matthew 25: 31-46

For most of my life prior to becoming a local preacher many years ago I was completely oblivious to the existence of the preaching lectionary. In my ignorance, I assumed that preachers just picked readings and themes at random. The lectionary is structured in such a way that it operates on a three yearly cycle and the new year always begins on Advent Sunday, so, bearing that in mind, this Sunday is the final day of this current year and like all good books we end with the great revelation. Having journeyed past all the old familiar places and reflected on the life and ministry of Christ we are now left with the question Who is this Jesus? And why was he such an influence on the people of Palestine and the world since then?

I was greatly influenced in the spring of 2001 by the BBC programme "The Son of God" serious journalist Jeremy Bowen looked at the evidence about the life and teaching of this man Jesus of Nazareth. The programme was revolutionary in its time because it made use of impressive computer graphics, to recreate what the world would have looked like in the time of Jesus. I remember going and buying the book written by Angela Tilby which accompanied the series, Jeremy Bowen writes the introduction to the book and goes to lengths to point out that he has no religious beliefs himself, towards the end of the introduction he writes.

*As you will find out in this book, there is compelling historical evidence that a man called Jesus lived in Palestine around two thousand years ago. He formulated a series of ideas that were developed by his followers and which still resonate around the world. All that is for certain.*

*And was he really the Son of God? Well, that is not something that can be proved. You either believe it or you don't.*

That is the key question on this final Sunday before the beginning of Advent this year. In our bible story today Jesus refers to himself as "The Son of Man" and scholars interpret this term to mean God incarnate (God in human form), the claim of Jesus in the story is that he has the authority to decide who is received into the Kingdom of Heaven, and who will be cast out.

In much the same way as the Middle East journalist Jeremy Bowen suggests, there is hard evidence of the existence of the man Jesus, there is clear documented accounts of how a small group of disciples developed a theology which became a world wide religion, but in the end, all of us weigh up what we read, hear peoples interpretation of the

texts and pray, but in the end we need to reflect on what this means to us and how it affects the way we live our lives. Based on all of what you have thought today and during the acts of worship during the last year I ask you now to: -

**Consider:**

- Who do you believe this man Jesus was?
- What are the most important lessons you have learned from his teaching and his ministry during the year that began on Advent Sunday 2022?
- How does any of this influence your decision making and your relationships with other people?

**A time of prayer**

Gracious God, we bring before you our prayers for the world

We pray for all those who lack physical things, food, shelter, water, and all of life's necessities.

We pray for those who mourn, and those who ail. Lord, for those we may help, may our hands work quickly, and for those we personally cannot help, we pray for the hands that will.

We pray for all those who work to provide care and help to others. Lord bless them and keep them from tiredness and error, and those they care for, keep them from despair. We bring the names of those known to us before you...

We pray for all in spiritual distress, who struggle to hear your message, or to come to you in prayer. Lord, help them to heed.

We pray for ourselves. Strengthen us to come through renewed in faith in certainty.

We pray for our land and nation. Lord, help us all to endure, to do our duty and to serve you faithfully. May our land be brightened by the Light of Lord as we leave these times behind.

Lord, we ask these things, knowing that when we pray, wherever we pray, you hear our prayers. Thanks be unto you, Father Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

**The Lord's Prayer:**

**Hymn: StF 351 In Christ alone** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljlsOQ269I4>

In Christ alone, my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This Cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease  
My Comforter, my All in All  
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh  
Fullness of God in helpless babe  
This gift of love and righteousness  
Scorned by the ones He came to save  
'Til on that cross as Jesus died  
The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid  
Here in the death of Christ I live, I live

There in the ground His body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave He rose again  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me  
For I am His and He is mine  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

**A prayer of blessing**

Lord, as we go forth, may we see all the things you long for us to notice. May we be your people in all we do and say. Amen