



**Opening prayer:**

Gentle, nurturing God, breathe your still calm voice into this time and this space.  
Enfold me in your loving embrace as we share in this, your holy fellowship.  
In the name of Jesus, born amongst us, I pray. Amen.

**Hymn 181 StF** Watch on YouTube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9JUt\\_G\\_Js0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9JUt_G_Js0)

**Of the Father's love begotten**

Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the source, the ending he,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see,  
Evermore and evermore.

By his word was all created;  
He commanded, it was done;  
Earth and sky and boundless ocean,  
Universe of three in one;  
All that sees the moon's soft radiance,  
All that breathes beneath the sun,  
Evermore and evermore.

This is he whom seers in old time  
Chanted of with one accord,  
Whom the voices of the prophets  
Promised in their faithful word;  
Let creation praise its Lord,  
Evermore and evermore.

O you heights of heaven, adore him;  
Angel hosts, his praises sing;  
All dominions, bow before him,  
And extol our God and King;  
Let no tongue on earth be silent,  
Every voice in concert sing,  
Evermore and evermore.

**Prayers:**

God of life and light who came and lived amongst us, Christ made man, son of Mary.  
who grew from child of hope to Man of God I praise your holy name.

God of forgiveness and grace, I ask your healing forgiveness for all that does not honour and serve your love,  
and trust in your unchanging promise: I give thanks that you forgive my sins.

God of time and patience whose eternal spirit reaches out to us and brings time to pause, to wait, for your still small  
voice of calm.

Holy Spirit, our great companion. move amongst us and reveal your kingdom in this time and this place.

In the name of God, our creator, redeemer, and Sustainer I pray. Amen.

**Collect of the Day:**

God of glory, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us in your Son Jesus  
Christ: grant that as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share in the life of his divinity, who is alive and  
reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

**Old Testament Reading      Isaiah 61:10-62:3**

This second part of the book of the prophet Isaiah is believed by contemporary commentators to have been written  
during the time of the exile in Babylon, a period when life was tough and in a time of doom and gloom and  
despondency, the role of the prophets is to inject optimism and hope into their dire situation. With everything that  
is going on in the world as 2023 comes to an end we can possibly empathise with the Israelite people over five  
hundred years before the birth of Christ.

I find myself feeling quite hopeless as I look at the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, as I try to imagine how reversing the  
global climate crisis can happen, as I try to figure out how to help the people in the greatest need in the world and in  
our own country, As I try to figure out how the Christian faith can be more relevant in the modern age, and where I  
stand as a leader in the church. For me the issues facing the world and challenging my ministry are way beyond my  
mental capabilities. As we read the words of the prophet Isaiah, we need to ask ourselves.

*Consider:*

- *What concerns us the most as 2023 comes to any end and we turn the corner into a new year?*

- *How does all of this make you feel?*
- *People often ask when everything seems to be falling apart “where is God in all of this” Where do you find the light of God in the darkest places?*

**Hymn 197 StF** Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TCrre2ibYs>

Cradled in a manger, meanly,  
laid the Son of Man his head;  
sleeping his first earthly slumber  
where the oxen had been fed.  
Happy were those shepherds listening  
to the holy angel’s word;  
happy they within that stable  
worshipping their infant Lord.

Happy all who hear the message  
of his coming from above;  
happier still who hail his coming,  
and with praises greet his love.  
Blessèd Saviour, Christ most holy,  
in a manger thou didst rest;  
canst thou stoop again, yet lower,  
and abide within my breast?

Evil things are there before thee;  
in the heart, where they have fed,  
wilt thou pitifully enter,  
Son of Man, and lay thy head?  
Enter, then, O Christ most holy;  
make a Christmas in my heart;  
make a heaven of my manger:  
it is heaven where thou art.

And to those who never listened  
to the message of thy birth,  
who have winter, but no Christmas  
bringing them thy peace on earth,  
send to these the joyful tidings;  
by all people, in each home,  
be there heard the Christmas anthem;  
praise to God, the Christ has come!

**A time of prayer:**

Enduring, eternal God, of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, and Joseph, who left all behind them to follow you.

We ask for your strength and guidance to follow in their footsteps.

Powerful, transforming God, of Isaiah and Ezekiel, Micah, and Amos, who spoke of you in their time and their place, we ask for your powerful words and actions in places of need today.

Creating, unsettling God, of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for your arrival, help us to continue to prepare your way and equip us in your service.

Parenting, nurturing, God, of Mary and Joseph, we think of our families, those we choose and those chosen for us, we call them to mind bring us into your warm embrace so that no matter how near or far we know your love reaches out to us all.

Patient, hope-filled God, of Simeon and Anna we give thanks for those whose testimony, and fellowship to you crosses generations. We pray for your church, trusting that as we watch and wait, work, and pray, we can bear witness to the love of God, the light of Christ and the wisdom of the Spirit. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer:**

**Gospel Luke 2: 22-40**

Often when we read the Christmas story, we identify the Shepherds and the visitors from the East as the only witnesses to the new-born Messiah. The shepherds were the lowest of the low and the wise men foreigners who by their nature and their lack of knowledge of the scriptures were likely to be gentiles. We must be careful not to forget Simeon and Anna, who were deeply religious people, who were watching out for the coming of the Messiah and found fulfilment in the temple as Mary and Joseph brought the Christ Child for the act of purification.

George Stringer Rowe, the author of our last hymn refers to “those who never listened to the message” those who “have winter, but no Christmas” we can be certain that at Christmas 2023 there will be those who will experience winter, but no Christmas for a multitude of reasons. We assume that the whole of the Jewish community in the day of Jesus were eagerly awaiting the promised Messiah and instead of bowing down and worshipping him, they condemned him to an agonizing death on the cross. We must be careful when we claim “everybody!” assuming that if we speak for one, we speak for all. Simeon and Anna were old people and there is something wonderful about them being able to depart this life in peace, with the knowledge of the gift from God that they are witnessing.

**Consider:**

- *As the language we hear this Christmas time is all about everybody having a wonderful time, spare a thought for those who have found Christmas 2023 a tough experience. Who are they? Do you know their circumstances? Pray for them, by name if you know it, or by situation if your thoughts are more general.*

- *The world stands today on the threshold of a New Year 2024. Do you stand like Simeon and Anna, waiting in hope? What are your greatest desires for this New Year. Spend a few moments in prayer seeking the guidance of God's Holy Spirit.*

**Hymn 222 StF:** Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwCyLamhFrk>

Who would think that what was needed  
to transform and save the earth  
might not be a plan or army,  
proud in purpose, proved in worth?  
Who would think, despite derision,  
that a child should lead the way?  
God surprises earth with heaven,  
coming here on Christmas Day.

Centuries of skill and science  
span the past from which we move,  
yet experience questions whether,  
with such progress, we improve.  
While the human lot we ponder,  
lest our hopes and humour fray,  
God surprises earth with heaven  
coming here on Christmas Day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,  
monarchs scorn and angels sing;  
such a place as none would reckon  
hosts a holy helpless thing;  
Stable beasts and by-passed strangers  
watch a baby laid in hay:  
God surprises earth with heaven  
coming here on Christmas Day.

#### **A prayer of blessing**

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:  
your word has been fulfilled.  
My own eyes have seen the salvation  
which you prepared in the sight of every people;  
A light to reveal you to the nations  
and the glory of your people Israel.  
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.