



**Call to Worship - Genesis 1:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

**Hymn - 53 - How shall I sing that majesty**

How shall I sing that majesty  
which angels do admire?  
Let dust in dust and silence lie;  
sing, sing, ye heavenly choir.  
Thousands of thousands stand around  
thy throne, O God most high;  
ten thousand times ten thousand sound  
thy praise; but who am I?

Thy brightness unto them appears,  
whilst I thy footsteps trace;  
a sound of God comes to my ears,  
but they behold thy face:  
They sing because thou art their sun;

Lord, send a beam on me;  
for where heaven is but once begun  
there alleluias be.

How great a being, Lord, is thine,  
which doth all beings keep!  
Thy knowledge is the only line  
to sound so vast a deep.  
Thou art a sea without a shore,  
a sun without a sphere;  
thy time is now and evermore,  
thy place is everywhere.

John Mason (c.1645-1694)

**Prayer**

God of this New Year and of all new years, God of this Epiphany and of every epiphany,  
God of Jesus's Baptism and all baptisms, We come in worship and thanksgiving.

This day we reflect as we look back on a year, We see moments of relief and regret,  
We see moments of pleasure and pain. As we come in worship and thanksgiving.

We confess our sins to you. We did not trust you in the pain nor thank you in the pleasure; We did not see you in  
the relief nor seek your strength when it was hard. We pray for forgiveness as we worship.

God of renewal, may we be forgiven. God of salvation may we feel assured.  
God of resurrection may we know life. May our worship and thanksgiving come to life.

God of all things, of all times and places, Jesus Christ our Saviour and our Lord,  
Empowering Spirit of the world we are in, We come in worship and thanksgiving.

We hand this time to God, To Father, Son and to Holy Spirit, And we pray together the words that came to us,  
From God among us as we worship:

**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.

**Responsive Reading - Psalm 29**

Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

**Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness.**

The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.  
**The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic.**

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.  
**He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox.**

The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning.  
**The voice of the Lord shakes the desert; the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh.**

The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare.  
**And in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'**

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King for ever.  
**The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.**

### **Hymn - 111 - Lord of the boundless curves of space**

Lord of the boundless curves of space  
and time's deep mystery,  
to your creative might we trace  
all nature's energy.

You gave a growing consciousness,  
first sown when time began,  
with all our longing to progress,  
discover, shape and plan.

Your mind conceived the galaxy,  
each atom's secret planned,  
and every age of history  
your purpose, Lord, has spanned.

In Christ the living power of grace  
to liberate and lead  
lights up the future of our race  
with mercy's crowning deed.

Your Spirit gave the living cell  
its hidden, vital force:  
the instincts which all life impel  
derive from you, their source.

Lead us, whom love has made and sought,  
to find, when planets fall,  
that Omega of life and thought  
where Christ is all in all.

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### **Reading - Acts 19:1-7**

#### Paul in Ephesus

**19** While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples <sup>2</sup> and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'

They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'

<sup>3</sup> So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?'

'John's baptism,' they replied.

<sup>4</sup> Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.

### **Reading - Mark 1:4-11**

<sup>4</sup> And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

#### The baptism and testing of Jesus

<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

### **Hymn - 396 - Spirit who broods**

Spirit who broods, Spirit who sings,  
mothering bird, peace in your wings -  
*Come from within, come, make us one,  
come and renew the face of the earth.*

Spirit of love, larger than law,  
quick to forgive, keeping no score -  
*Chorus*

Spirit of truth, laser and light  
searching the path, seeking the right -  
*Chorus*

Spirit of hope, never subdued,  
Spirit of God, Spirit of Good,  
*Chorus*

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### **Sermon - Gearing up (Acts 19:5)**

*On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

As we worship today, just a few days into another year, a poll of what we all wish for might be interesting. There would be a range of expressed desires, some quite selfish and others more general. It is likely that a common theme amongst people of goodwill, once the horizon is broadened, would be a desire for peace.

Peace in relationships. Peace from inner turmoil. Peace in areas of war, in so many places in the world. It is difficult to stop thinking about the land of Jesus's birth. We pray for peace in Gaza; for some sort of reconciliation between Israel and Palestine that brings lasting stability and not merely something tenuous and temporary, the result of interventions by global neighbours.

Today when we remember the Baptism of Jesus and read it alongside an account of the baptism of new believers, we are reminded that attaining peace is a process. Peace is not achieved by magic and peace comes by developing relationships, not merely by stopping something.

The same can be said of peace of heart and mind, and peace with God. Peace is developed by degrees; it is not imposed.

When I was a boy, I rode my bicycle a lot. We lived in the countryside and if I wanted to see anyone away from the immediate family, a bike was freedom and contact. I had a simple bike with no gears and desperately wanted a three-speed option. To my joy, in about 1970 or 71, under the Christmas tree there was a back wheel for a bike. It fitted my bike, and it had a three-speed hub. My life was transformed. Hills were easier, and overall speed was increased.

The principle of gearing is simple. The ratio of turns of one sprocket or cog to another one is varied according to the requirements. This is not the place to get stuck into the complexity of gearboxes or discuss clocks, but simply remember that gearing up in the case of my bike meant that for each turn of the pedal, the higher the gear the further the back wheel turned.

The world around us is complex and many things are highly geared. Stopping is hard as we all found out when much of life slowed right down quickly to contain the COVID pandemic in 2020.

The beginning was simple. As we are reminded in Genesis 1, for a start there was nothing but water and darkness until gradually things became more diverse, colourful, and complex. Creation geared up and look at it now...stop and think about all the interdependencies, the gear ratios that enable everyday miracles of life and abundance,

Psalms 27 reminds us that God is all powerful, with the ability to smash the mechanism and stop the process. From early times people have recognised the mystery that is God behind the miracles and worshipped him. God's response has been to enable strength and peace within those people who acknowledge a bigger power and presence than their own. Sometimes, God has worked through people to enable them to gear up to be far bigger than they could be without special help.

Throughout the long history of past ages before the arrival of Jesus, God's interventions and involvement were general and apart from gearing up special leaders, ordinary people interfaced with God through ritual and routine; they ebbed and flowed as whole communities.

Then came John the Baptist. Individuals were called to repent of their sins to receive forgiveness. An individual carpenter joined the crowd and was spotted by John who knew that this person was differently geared from everyone else. While John's baptism was introducing individual responsibility for response to God, what happened next was like moving directly from a single speed child's bike to a multi-sprocket racer with any number of gears on both the input and the output side.

When John Baptised Jesus there was a crack in the sky and a valedictory voice spoke out. The power released did not shatter the cedars or blow-up volcanoes, it was channelled into Jesus in whom the effect would be seen first in his area over the coming couple of years or so but is still being felt by people like us a couple of thousand years later.

The reading from the Acts [19] gives an account of Saint Paul in Ephesus. He meets a group of believers who have had the same baptism from Apollos that John had been giving previously at the Jordan. These people were taking ownership for past sins because they were grasping the concept of faith in a bigger God. They were ready for gearing up.

Paul talked to them about the previously unknown, or unencountered, Holy Spirit. As they listened there was another of those routine cracking moments when new power came. Those people received new gifts and capabilities as they, like Paul himself, like a handful of great leaders in the Old Testament, and like Jesus's original disciples could do and be what previously was beyond them. They were geared up.

The gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are the matter for other sermons, and they are life experiences for baptised believers.

As we venture into 2024 in the hope and trepidation we feel as we begin anything new, we have our wishes. Whether personal or global peace are our aim and regardless of the reach of our endeavours the principles are the same. There is no pre-prepared formula that can be applied to bring peace to Gaza, or it would have happened. There is no pre-prepared answer to the problems and questions of our lives.

We can accept one truth that will release many blessings. On our own, we are like a direct drive machine or bike with equal size sprockets on both pedals and wheel. One turn of the pedals means we go forward by the circumference of the wheel – 2 feet on 24" wheels! Change sprocket size and this varies.

The Holy Spirit is infinitely variable and will suit the requirements of every situation or person. The energy we put into our faith will make things happen, and the more commitment we show the more we will achieve for God relative to our capabilities. We see it happening around us in God's people we know.

The same is the solution to global problems. Our prayers for peace need to be as much for the commitment of leaders in faith to God as it is for direct intervention by God himself. His gearing up of human achievement may be just the miracle we all seek.

And to God be honour, glory and praise, and to you, a Committed and highly geared Spirit enabled New Year. Amen.

### **Hymn - 393 - She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters**

She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters,  
hovering on the chaos of the world's first day;  
she sighs and she sings, mothering creation,  
waiting to give birth to all the Word will say.

She wings over earth, resting where she wishes,  
lighting close at hand or soaring through the skies;  
she nests in the womb, welcoming each wonder,  
nourishing potential hidden to our eyes.

She dances in fire, startling her spectators,  
waking tongues of ecstasy where dumbness  
reigned;  
She weans and inspires all whose hearts are open,  
nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained.

For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,  
gifted by the Saviour in eternal love;  
she is the key opening the scriptures,  
enemy of apathy and heavenly dove.

John L Bell (born 1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019)  
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### **Dedicating our Giving**

Generous and giving God, as this year opens and we commit anew to being your people, we bring gifts. Money earned, talents honed, and graces grown are all made possible by your Spirit within. We Give them and our time praying that your will work through us in your Kingdom. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

*Please use such of the following material as is useful to your needs...*

#### New Year

God of grace At the start of a new year, We offer you our thanks For the gifts of the year just ended  
For the possibility of new beginnings For time to reflect and look ahead.

We offer you our hopes For peace among the nations For forgiveness and reconciliation  
For understanding within our communities For health and wellbeing.  
We offer you our dreams and desires And the deepest thoughts of our hearts.

God of grace, You make all things new. We commit this year to you. Guide us, bless us and work within us,  
So that we may honour you in all we do.

*Sue McCoan © The United Reformed Church*

We pray for the world around us, it's peoples and nations; At war and in in peace, Coping with natural disaster  
and famine, Electing leaders and facing change. In all this, may we be led by you.

We pray for the people around us, the community, and families; In happiness and in sorrow, Tense relationships  
and harmonious ones, Relishing success and acknowledging setbacks. Whatever it is, be with us.

We pray for the church of which we are a part; In faith and in hope, Reaching out in mission or reflecting on  
decline, Facing up to change but seeking guidance, Knowing we are your Church.

We pray in Faith, Sometimes fearful, Sometimes fretful, Sometimes hopeful Seeking strength to be ever faithful.

*"It is in the grit of the earth that we find the glory of heaven..."*

*H A Williams*

Like gold buried deep in the earth, God's gift lies deep within us, Waiting only to be revealed.  
Brought into the light such treasures shine with divine radiance, Filling the world, spilling out into the lives of  
others, Revealing God's presence among us. Lord, help us to see the hidden treasures In ourselves and others,  
Which you have placed there for the good of all And so to value them that their richness may be shared,  
For the good of all and for the glory of God.

We give thanks for the many gifts manifest in the people of the Bristol District [of The Methodist Church] – for  
presbyters and deacons, local preachers and worship leaders, musicians and dancers, poets and prophets,  
ordinary people with extraordinary gifts. We pray for those who quietly serve others in food banks and warm  
hubs or in their wider communities; for those working in new housing areas, for pioneers working in circuits and  
in initiatives across the District; for those who serve as chaplains in education, healthcare, MHA, prisons, in the  
workplace and for all who support them. We pray, too, for the District's longstanding link with The Korean  
Methodist Church.

*Jonathan Pye, District Chair, Bristol District © Methodist Church*

#### Fresh awakening

Holy Spirit of God – wake us up! Come and fill your church With your dynamic life-giving presence.  
Blow the cobwebs away, and cleanse us From everything that is dirty or impure. Come and make your home  
within us and among us. Ignite our hearts with your divine love; With your compassion and concern for this  
world that is so lost. Release your gifts among us, your people, so that together We may have all we need to be

effective and fruitful. Empower us to take the Good News of Jesus out Into our communities to bring transformation and hope. In Jesus's great and mighty name we pray.

**Amen.**

*Brian Harley © The United Reformed Church*

### **Hymn - 14 - Sing to him in whom creation**

Sing to him in whom creation  
Found its shape and origin;  
Spirit, moving on the waters  
Troubled by the God within;  
Source of breath to all things breathing,  
Life in whom all lives begin.

Sing to God, the close companion  
Of our inmost thoughts and ways;  
Who, in showing us his wonders,  
Is himself the power to gaze,  
And his will, to those who listen,  
By a still small voice conveys.

Holy men, both priest and prophet,  
Caught his accents, spoke his word;  
His the truth behind the wisdoms  
Which as yet know not our Lord;  
He the love of God eternal,  
Which in Christ was seen and heard.

Tell of how the ascended Jesus  
Armed a people for his own;  
How a hundred men and women  
Turned the known world upside down,  
To its dark and farthest corners  
By the wind of Whitsun blown.

Pray we, then, O Lord the Spirit.  
On our lives descend in might;  
Let thy flame break out within us,  
Fire our hearts and clear our sight,  
Till, white-hot in thy possession,  
We, too, set the world alight.

Praise, O praise the Holy Spirit,  
Praise the Father, praise the Word,  
Source, and Truth, and Inspiration,  
Trinity in deep accord;  
Through thy Voice which speaks within us  
We thy creatures own thee Lord.

*Michael Hewlett (1916-2000) © Oxford University Press*

### **Blessing**

Gracious God, you have promised to make all things new: restore peace where there has been hatred, reduce tension where there has been anger, rekindle friendship where there has been enmity, relieve suffering where there has been violence and recreate a united nation; for the good of the people and for the peace of the world. In Christ's name. **Amen**

*Michael Saward @Jubilate 2023*

May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen.**