

Our song to sing or to read: The Voice of God

The voice of God goes out to all the world.
His glory speaks across the universe.
The great King's herald cries from star to star.
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

The Lord has said 'Receive my messenger
my promise to the world, my pledge made flesh
a lamp to every nation, light from light.
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

The broken reed he will not trample down
nor set his heel upon the dying flame.
He binds the wounds, and health is in his hand.
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

Anointed with the Spirit and with power
he comes to crown with comfort all the weak
to show the face of justice to the poor.
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

His touch will bless the eyes that darkness held
the lame shall run, the halting tongue shall sing
and prisoners laugh in light and liberty.
With power, with justice, he will walk his way.

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A Prayer

God, our Father you have called us. You have blessed us with your presence, and have become part of our lives. So we seek renewal and recommitment to follow Jesus, the light of the world. To live our lives as he taught and showed us. To make all our thoughts, words and deeds worthy of Christ Jesus, the Lord for all humankind. This we pray as we move into the New Year.
Amen

With thanks to Brian Turrell for preparing today's reflection



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Gathering

We have celebrated Christmas: the birth of Jesus. We have rejoiced in witnessing the true spirit of Christmas in the outreach of helping all people to experience Christ's love in practical ways – in offering gifts, sharing food, and revelling in the company of family and friends. We witness so many seeking to practise Jesus' care for the lonely, the disadvantaged, the neglected and the poor. We give thanks for the message of Christmas, and now we prepare ourselves for continuing to love one another as we approach the New Year.
Amen



Preparation

As we look ahead to another year, after a worrying 2020, we pray that we shall carry the spirit of Christmas into the New Year. As we reflect on the passage from Luke's Gospel, may its message help us to move on from the birth of Jesus and the excitement of Christmas, to acknowledging that Jesus is the promised Messiah for Jew and Gentile. What's more, as Simeon announced, Jesus will be "bringing glory to God's people, Israel," showing love, compassion and caring for all humanity. This is a message of how to live and how we can mould ourselves to be fit to live with others in a multicultural world.

Reading: Luke 2:22-40

Reflection

Luke invites us to move on from the birth of Jesus. He brings us an account of Joseph and Mary, taking Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord for the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded.

This story is an interesting one. Why, you ask? Well, Mark's gospel, the first gospel written in about the year 70, according to most Biblical scholars, begins with: "This is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God".

Then Matthew's Gospel, written in the early 80's, uses Mark's gospel as its basis, but adds a birth story, telling of wise men from the east seeking the baby, born to be the King of the Jews. It has, however, no mention of the ceremony of purification nor of Simeon and Anna. Again, we may ask, why the birth story and why no purification story? One possible explanation may be that at this time of writing, Matthew was aware of and concerned with the growing unrest and anger among Jews about the Jews who had become followers of Jesus. They were continuing to worship in the synagogues. So Matthew wrote his gospel, with his fellow Jews in mind, to show that Jesus was "born to be the King of the Jews," and that he was the fulfilment of the Scriptures.

Now we come to Luke's Gospel, also written in the 80's but after Matthew's, with his birth story and his account of Simeon and Anna. We wonder why was this birth story so different from Matthew's, and why is the Simeon and Anna story only in Luke? I suggest that it is to add to the purpose of his birth story. Luke, I contend, aimed to stress, even prove, that Jesus was the Christ: the Messiah for Jew and Gentile. Look at Luke's birth story. We are told that angels announced: "This very day in David's town your Saviour was born – Christ the Lord". The emphasis here was: "your Saviour – Christ the Lord", not "King of the Jews". In today's reading Luke adds the story of Simeon who refers to Jesus "as a light to reveal your (God's)will to the Gentiles... "

Luke's purpose in adding today's reading is clearly to further emphasise the message that Jesus has come not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles.

One may wonder why Luke differed from Matthew's gospel in stressing that Jesus was the Messiah for both Jew and Gentile, and question who Luke was. Tradition has it that the author of the gospel is the beloved physician, a companion of Paul, as referred to in Colossians 4: 14: "Luke, our dear doctor, and Demas, send you their greetings". And in Paul's letter to Philemon, he wrote at the end of his letter "Epaphras ... send you his greetings, and so do my fellow workers, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke".

John T Squires in the Cambridge Companion to the Gospels wrote: "The fact that the author also appears to be most knowledgeable about Judaism and familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, indicates that he may have been a gentile, God-fearing, or more likely, a hellenized Jew".

Perhaps, if this Luke is the author of the gospel bearing his name, his experiences working with Paul in Asia Minor-among Jew and Gentile, caused him to become a believer and showed him the need to stress that Jesus's life and message were for both... for all humanity.

