

Welcome:

Have you ever thought what would have happened if there had been three wise women instead of wise men? They would have stopped to ask for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole and brought disposable nappies and other practical gifts!

The words of each reading, hymn, prayer and the message have been chosen carefully because they have spoken to me and my prayer is that they will speak to you and bring you the comfort, the encouragement and the strength that we all need as we enter this New Year.

Call to worship: Psalm 103:1-5 NIV:

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Opening praise: Who would think (CH4 295)

1st reading: Isaiah 55:6-13 NIV:

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on them, and to our God, for He will freely pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.

2nd reading: Hebrews 6:18b-20 NIV:

The Certainty of God's Promise

. . . we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer (taken from Radio Kirk during lockdown):

Almighty God Our Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts to you in prayer as we recall the words of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us how to pray: Father, Holy is Your name. As we make this time and space to halo Your name, recognising that all the kingdoms

of the earth are Yours, all creation is Yours, and as we pray for the needs of the world, we ask You to bless and guide all decision-makers charged with leading us out of these difficult times and ensuring the safety and well-being of all people. May all who govern us direct our nations through the path of justice and peace and through that same direction may You reveal Your will and may Your name be honoured and lifted high.

Father, we pray that Your Kingdom may come and Your will be done here on earth as in heaven. We therefore hold before You our church leaders of all traditions and for Your church across our country and world wide we pray that it might be steadfast in the faith and strong in mind and spirit to resist all that seeks to undermine Your Word. We ask that where we are corrupt we may be purified, where we are in error You may direct us and where anything is amiss You may reform us.

Father, as You give us our daily bread, the sustenance that we need and not that we may necessarily desire, we remember all those who struggle for the basic needs of daily living, for those who have no food, shelter, clothing, or peace and freedom. We therefore pray for all who suffer the pain of sickness, the wounds of loss or desolation of loneliness and the terror of war and oppression. Comfort and heal Lord, all those who suffer in body, mind or in spirit, be they known to us or known only to You. Give them courage and hope in their troubles and enfold them in Your arms of love.

And we ask also for Your forgiveness for our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, praying for a spirit of forgiveness to move within the church and throughout the world. And when we cling to a lack of forgiveness and resentment, may we seek to be forgiving in the same generosity of spirit as Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, had to those who persecuted Him.

We ask that You may lead us from temptation and deliver us from all evil. We ask that You may lead us in the light of Your love and truth and away from the temptation to follow the voices that take us further from You and down paths that are contrary to Your commandments. May Your Spirit enter the hearts and minds of all who are misguided by the lures of worldly demands. May we be granted Your protection from harmful influences of evil.

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we acknowledge that the Kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours and that we depend on You for all our needs. Be therefore with us, Lord, as we walk with You into a New Year, that we may always be defended by Your gracious help. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Orkney Reflections

Choir: Open my eyes

Message:

This has been based on some of my recent studies in Premier Christian Radio's booklet "Voice of Hope" and the "Be Still and Know" section by Jonathan Edwards.

If you speak to most people about the future, they will be full of fears and uncertainties. We live with a continual threat of international terrorism, and the wildfires, floods and hurricanes that batter us remind us of the appalling challenge of climate change. Wherever we look, there are monumental problems to face in our own society and throughout the world and most people would probably assume that there is no hope and that anyone who speaks the language of hope has chosen to ignore the facts.

The writer to the Hebrews, however, was full of hope and speaks of it on a number of occasions. He was confident as he looked to the future because he knew his God so well. He knew that God was a place of refuge amidst the storms of life, and that He provided an anchor that could be entirely relied upon. He never claimed life would be problem free. He anticipated that the church was likely to face renewed waves of persecution, and he knew that those who follow Christ would always be severely tested. But he knew that the anchor would hold and that is what mattered most.

The old hymn asked the question, "Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?" and that is the key issue. We need to know that when disaster strikes we have an anchor that is able to hold firm, and prevent us from being dashed against the rocks. When everything is going well it might seem irrelevant whether we have an anchor or not. But the fact is that we need hope to inspire and encourage us whatever the weather, and when that hope is securely founded on our faith in Christ we can be confident that when problems occur we have nothing to fear. Our anchor will hold.

What are our plans for the next year? No doubt some of them appear to be set in stone. Perhaps work, family, church and social commitments are firmly fixed and there doesn't seem to be much flexibility in them. But look at them again. What changes might be happening and what challenges might we have to face? The truth is, life is always changing and, as we look at the coming months, we need to take hold of our plans and commit them to the Lord. Maybe things will flow in exactly the way we anticipate, but maybe they won't. We need to be light on our feet and ready to adjust to the new ways in which the Lord might want to lead us.

But whatever we do, we need to make sure that we don't act like simpletons. We have done that too often in the past and we should have learnt the lesson by now. From time to time, we all face decisive moments. We can't dither any longer. We have to decide which way we want to go. There will always be a range of options, but amid the clamour we can hear the voice of Jesus saying: "Come follow Me" (Luke 18:22). People have trodden this path for 2,000 years, but He calls us amid the cut and thrust of 21st century life. The principles of following Jesus haven't changed at all, and the outcome will be the same as it was for previous generations. Since Old Testament times God has invited people to travel on the old, Godly path, assuring them that they would find rest for their souls. And significantly, that is exactly what Jesus promised as well. He said: "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). This doesn't mean that Jesus gives us a rest. That's different! But He promises us His peace and takes away the burden of anxiety and fear. When we are yoked to Jesus, the burden is always light.

Perhaps these are some questions that we should ask ourselves as we enter this New Year:

Are we reading our Bibles for information or transformation?

Is there anything in our lives that God is consistently dealing with, that we are trying to ignore?

Is there anyone in our lives to whom we need to apologise, and is there anyone in our lives that we need to forgive?

Are we fully utilising the time, the talents, the treasure that God has entrusted to us and is God asking us to serve in some practical way in our Kirk or in our community?

Who are the people in our lives that God has placed around us for the purpose of sharing Good News?

Have we surrendered our lives to Christ to reign and rule over them, doing anything and everything for Him and with Him?

2nd Hymn: Will your anchor hold? (CH4 737)

Prayer (taken from a Sunday morning program by J.John):

Lord, we pray that You will touch us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, that You will set us free from any disappointment and regret, praying that You would liberate us from the past. May we experience Your forgiveness; may we experience Your peace. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit, help us to fulfill whatever You tell us to do. As we honour You we ask that You will honour us. Lord, we pray that You will give us all wisdom to know what we should do with the time, the talents and the treasure that You have entrusted to us. Lord, give us the passion and give us a compassion for all people. Help us to be channels of grace, of Good News. May we be messengers of Good News to lost people. May we bring life and light and truth to others. And we pray and we ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

3rd Hymn: In the bleak midwinter (CH4 305)

Benediction (also taken from J. John):

Lord, we pray now to You, the Great Physician, that You will release Your healing power and Your healing Presence. Put Your healing balm on our bodies, on our hearts, on our minds. We pray now, Lord Jesus, for healing. We speak healing in our county, in our country and healing in our hurting world and we pray, Lord God, that You will fill us with the peace of the Father, the Presence of Jesus and the power of Your Holy Spirit. We pray for the blessing of God the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, that we might be both blessed and be a blessing to others. Amen.

May the God of peace go with us (CH4 786)