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CHRISTMAS 1B

31st December 2023

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Call to worship

In the beginning was the Word.

Let your presence be known to be me now, dear God, by the grace of the words, the music, the silence and the reflection of this time of worship.

As you were made known to us in the presence of Christ,
May I know your presence amongst me this day,
In Jesus' name I pray,

Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Readings: Luke 2:22-40 – [Click for reading](#)

Reflections on the reading

Simeon and Anna are similarly blessed by their encounter with the infant Jesus – 'newness' reaches them, in their old age.

As we stand on the cusp of a new year, today's Gospel story bring to mind a line from Psalm 85:

I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people. But let them not return to their foolish ways.

Do you start the year with the best intentions, and set yourself the loftiest of goals? Are you going to lose half your body weight by May? Or start a punishing gym routine? Are you going to start keeping a journal, committing to at least five full pages per day? In the vast majority of cases, it's not too long before we "return to our foolish ways," and settle back into old habits.

No doubt, we all have improvements we can make to the way we live, and it's good to use the beginning of the year as an opportunity to do just that; we have a 'clean slate', and a duty to begin a new year on the right footing. However, how many of us set the bar far too high?

In today's reading, Simeon and Anna encounter a radical change in their lives very late – but it doesn't motivate a 'fad diet' in them, rather a deep contentment with who they are and their ministry coming to an end.

I can't help but feel that our shame takes the wheel at this time of year. We use the notion of, 'New Year, New Me' to pick ourselves apart and jab at the aspects we're ashamed of. These things become sticks we can beat ourselves with, driving our self-esteem into the ground as we bemoan our apparent lack of willpower.

As we prepare to welcome 2024, perhaps it's time to pause and take stock. Let's take a moment to hear this verse from the psalmist again:

I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people.

The Lord speaks peace to his faithful people.

Peace.
Peace be with you.
My peace I leave with you.
May the Lord look upon you with favour, and grant you peace.
Let us learn to be at peace with ourselves.
Let us learn to be at peace with one another.
Amen.

Hymn:

330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come! - [YouTube](#)

190 STF – Angels, from the realms of glory - [YouTube](#)

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Blessing

As you go out into this new year, may you be encouraged and inspired by your encounter with the Spirit of God,
As you face difficult times and joyful moments in 2024, may God be your guide and your companion
And may you know the miracle of Immanuel, God with us.
Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 1st January 2024

- It is New Year's Day!
- Amongst whatever other traditions and plans you have for today, perhaps you could spend a bit of time thinking about what a 'mantra' for this year could be.
- A mantra is a very short sentence or phrase that you can say over and over again, in this case it would be helpful if it is something that helps you to focus on God, or be attentive to God's work in your life.
- Some suggestions include: 'I know that I am loved', 'what is mine to do?', 'I am blessed indeed', 'be still and know', 'a peace that passes understanding' or 'show me'.
- Whatever you settle on, write it down somewhere where you will see it several times in the day, and encourage yourself to say it, perhaps even out loud.

Tuesday 2nd January

- This new year, Lord,
My hope is in you.

You share our sorrows, worries,
weep with and love all.

Born in a manger.
Taught peace, love, understanding.
Crucified on that cross.
Kyrie eleison. Amen.

Wednesday 3rd January

- Light a candle.
- Jesus, you are the light of the world.
- Today, pray about the places you experience darkness in your life, that Jesus' light might shine divine light into those spaces and places.

Thursday 4th January

- Today, on the eleventh day of Christmas, you might like to pray this prayer:
God of all grace,
Thank you for all that we have received – thank you that everything we have is gift.
Help me to appreciate all that I have and am.
Help me to live from a place of grace.
- Come amongst me, God of all grace.
Amen.

Friday 5th January

- Today is the Twelfth Day of Christmas – the final day of the Christmas season. How has the season been for you? How have you made time and space to appreciate the story of God-with-us this year?
- Take some time now, to check in on yourself, your body, your mind, your soul. How are you doing? No, really? Spend some time in quiet prayer and offer up your reflections to God.

Saturday 6th January

- Today is Epiphany.
In Western Christianity, this day is traditionally the one in which we celebrate the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus.