

Welcome

Welcome everyone to this worship time I hope and pray that it will speak to you through the word of God as we explore all that the Lord has done and promised.

PRAYER FOR WORSHIP:

Heavenly Father, please join us as we gather, and as we seek to know your divine will for us, your people. Thank you for being our ever loving, ever present Father, and above all as we draw near to the birth of your son, thank you for that most amazing gift, the atonement. Again you delivered on your promise to send the ONE.

Amen

SONG: 436 SIS by Mark Pendergrass

1. The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you
The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you
I want to know you more
I want to know you more
The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you
2. The greatest thing in all my life is serving you
The greatest thing in all my life is serving you
I want to serve you more
I want to serve you more
The greatest thing in all my life is serving you

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Message:

In your life what has been your experience with promises? There was an old saying often used by people who had no intention of honouring it "**the cheque's in the mail**" and "**trust me!**". When my daughters were growing up I used to say beware of people who say this. For Christians those "tools" of deception should not be used of course.

A Christian couple I know was keen on adding a daughter to their family. After much thought and prayer, they decided to adopt a little girl from Thailand. At the orphanage, they asked to see the child most rejected. They were shown a little girl, hiding her face as many Asian girls tend to do, and were told that she had been promised to several families already, only to be disappointed sometimes at the last minute again and again when they declined. What came out was this child had a hare lip and cleft pallet, an affliction in Thai (Buddhist) culture which meant that a member of her family had committed a grave sin in a past life- so she was 'bad luck'. The couple adopted her, and years later after much love, care, and surgery all in a Christian family, she now has her own family. Thanks to a promise kept, and a faith understood.

The Promise Made

- Micah 5:2

"But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour bears a son."

- Isaiah 7:14

"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel." (Also Isaiah 49:7 and 52:1-12)

And so it was that a small irrelevant town called Bethlehem became the birthplace of the promised Messiah. Why?? Everything about Jesus, his birth, his life, his ministry spells the ordinary, the everyman, the approachable, available, lovable Messiah. Not the king expected, not the repeat of David (the warrior king), not even the institutional reformer of Josiah. And certainly not the corrupt, faithless line of kings before. Not only the kings --- the faith institutions were also corrupt. High priests helping themselves to temple offerings, making extra laws to suit their own agenda, and worst of all embracing other gods (Marduk, Baal, Ashera etc.).

Against all this what could God possibly do. He had tried again and again to restore the relationship to no avail. As God saw things there was only one answer—his Son would need to enter the world, to save it. Enter the promise, made by a God who delivers (Matthew chapters 1 and 11).

In the midst of the chaos, and year after year of failure to hear the law, and in doing so to renew the covenant, and meet God, the Father could see only one way to restore relationship with his chosen people. The prophet Isaiah had revealed God's real plan and the kind of Messiah the world would receive "he took our pain and bore our suffering" and "by his wounds we are healed." This amazing fulfilled promise is really embodied in the ATONEMENT -- that will be central to the Messiah's coming. To put things right a restored relationship after hundreds of years of struggle and brokenness, disappointment and grief. All made possible through a child born in Bethlehem. (Micah).

Promise kept!

HYMN: Timothy Rees 1874-1939 alt.

1. God is love, let heaven and earth adore him, God is love, let earth rejoice,
Let creation sing before him, and exalt him with one voice,
He who laid the earth's foundation, He who spread the heavens above,
He who breathes through all creation, He is love, eternal Love.
2. God is love, and he, enfolding, all the world in one embrace,
With unfailing grasp is holding every child of every race,
And when human hearts are breaking under sorrows iron rod
Then they find that selfsame aching deep within the heart of God.
3. God is love, and though with blindness sin afflicts our human hearts,
God's eternal loving kindness holding, guiding, grace imparts,
Sin and death and hell shall never o'er us final triumph gain;
God is love, so love forever o'er the universe must reign.

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The promise fulfilled Matthew 11:2—11

Advent is here, and soon after we celebrate the birth of our saviour Jesus who brings the new covenant through the cross -- Jesus words from Matt 11 "all things have been committed to me by my Father. Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" The promise brings to us all the best Christmas gift – the peace of knowing and belonging, restoration and spiritual contentment through life in Christ.

The promise demands change: Matt 3:11-12 "I baptise you with water for repentance, but after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

John challenges those who come for baptism as a sign of repentance. There is more to come, something more profound, in keeping with the one who brings it. The Messiah will bring change—are they ready? Will they accept it? Questions that may very well be asked today of many folk.

Hymn: *Julia Ward Howe 1819-1910 and others*

1. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He has loosed the fateful lighting of his terrible swift sword
His truth is marching on.
2. In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom which transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us live to make men free,
While God is marching on.
3. He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave;
He is wisdom to the mighty; he is succour to the brave;
So the world shall be his footstool, and the soul of time his slave;
Our God is marching on.

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Prayers for the world:

Lord God,

Help our thinking about the much needy world around us. Well meaning we may be, but the need is greater than that. Father, we ask for your strength and peace for the many troubled people who are faithful to Jesus through great trials. We remember Jennifer of Barnabas Aid. Others too who stand upright for Jesus amidst great personal risk. Draw near to them, Father, in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Blessing:

Thank you all. May you experience the presence of Jesus in amazing ways this Christmas. I conclude with these words from Paul:

1 Tim2: 1—5 "I urge you then, first of all, that prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority..... This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people."

Amen.

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