

Welcome

Hymn 1

As with gladness *By K Kocher*

1. As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold'
as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led to thee
2. As they offered gifts most rare at thy cradle rude and bare
so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy
all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to thee, our heavenly King
3. In the heavenly country bright need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down
There for ever may we sing hallelujahs to our King.

Confession and Absolution

For failing to love you with all our heart, soul strength and mind **Lord have mercy**
For failing to love our neighbours as ourselves **Christ have mercy**
Forgive for what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be **Lord have mercy**
May the Father of love who sent his Son, Jesus, to be our saviour, forgive us and strengthen us by the power of his Spirit to serve him all our days **Amen**

Collect

Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new. Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

OT Reading Isaiah 49:1-7

- 1 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.
- 2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.
- 3 He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendour."
- 4 But I said, "I have laboured to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due to me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."
- 5 And now the LORD says -he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honoured in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—
- 6 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."
- 7 This is what the LORD says, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel, to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Reflection

On Christmas day Heather and I joined our church in Albanian by live-link. Meeting friends old and new we chatted away for over half an hour in both English and Albanian.

In Albania there are 2 basic ways of finding out who you are talking to, or talking about: *Si e ke emrin?* *Si quhet?* *Si e ke emrin?* means What name do you have? And *Si quhet?* What are you/he/she called?

Do you react when you hear your name called - though it might be someone else with the same name?

Our readings all have this theme 'Callings'

-Isaiah was 'called' by God to be a *servant of the Lord*. And that was before his birth! He wrote *Before I was born, the LORD called me, he chose me to be his servant, his spokesman. he formed me & called me in the womb*

Isaiah/ Israel/ & Jesus (our Redeemer) were all called to be '*my servant*', and called to be '*my splendour*' - that is: to serve God, to speak for him, to shine for him. And amazingly this call was - Pre conception, Pre natal

We hear so much about abortions. Did you know that there were about 1/4 million in UK last year; and the WHO estimate that 73 million babies were aborted worldwide - that's 206,000 lives lost a day.

When we hear claims of human rights (it's my body; what about the baby's rights?) When we hear about abortion clinics calling for a 'protest free' zone from peaceful demonstrations around their clinics; when we hear that

Parliament is planning a law to support this, we need to look at what God says in his Word; to see what God, our creator and Carer thinks of us.

The Bible says a lot about our pre-natal, pre-birth status. It says: We are special to God.

Babies are not inconvenient blobs to be aborted, they are people with potential.

Our next **hymn** tells us how Herod got rid of baby boys *Unto us a child is born* 15th cent, German Carol

- 1 Unto us a boy is born, King of all creation. Came he to a world forlorn,
The Lord of ev'ry nation, The Lord of ev'ry nation
 - 2 Cradled in a stall was he with sleepy cows and asses;
But the very beasts could see that he all men surpasses
 - 3 Herod then with fear was filled, "a prince" he said, "in Jewry!"
All the little boys he killed in Bethl'em in his fury, in Bethl'em in his fury
 - 4 Now may Mary's son, who came so long ago to love us,
Lead us all with hearts aflame unto the joys above us
- God has a heart for us all. He loves us - even before we were born!

Looking at the Christmas story in Luke 1 at our Advent home group, we read how John Baptist was *filled with the Spirit before his birth*.

God said to Jeremiah (in ch 1) "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you* In Ps 139 David wrote: *You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written. How precious are Your thoughts to me, O God!* God has a purpose for us. We read about this in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

2nd Reading

1 *Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,*
2 *To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:*
3 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
4 *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,*
5 *that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,*
6 *even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,*
7 *so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
8 *who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
9 *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Reflection 2

-Paul began his letter saying: I was *called by Christ to be an apostle* (an apostle is someone to share the good news of Jesus and to birth new churches from ground zero) This was God's will for me, and to this I was called.

-One of the churches Paul started was in Corinthian. He wrote to them telling them how they were called, how they carried the '*call*' gene. You were *called into the fellowship of His Son* Jesus Christ our Lord and ; *called by the Spirit to be saints* - a people separate from the world and separated to God; those transformed by God, not conformed by the world

Praise God, he has a purpose for everyone of us We are all called! The question is do we hear and do we obey

-The Christmas story tells us how Jesus, in eternity, was *called* - what he would be called & what he was called to John reminds us in Jn 1 how Jesus, from eternity is called *God the Son*. (That was something the Angel Gabriel said that to both Mary and Joseph before his incarnation).

500yrs before Christmas Isaiah foretold: *This is what the LORD says about the one called Redeemer and Holy One of Israel) to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to his servant "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."* And that's what we celebrate in Epiphany - the journey and joy of the Kings/ Wise men

Later John in his gospel records more of Christ's call in 1:29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

30 *"This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'*

31 *"I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."*

32 *And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.*

33 *"I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'*

34 *"And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.*

Jesus was Chosen to be called *Redeemer* - or as John Baptist referred to him: *The* (sacrificial) *Lamb of God* Isaiah called; Israel called; John Baptist called; Jesus called; Paul called; the Corinthians called; and us!

The Bible says: All of us are of infinite value to God - before our birth (and after).

God has a special place in his heart for us, and a special job for us to do: *he formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring people back to him*

Don't put yourself, or anyone else. God sets a high price on us - it's the sacrificed life of Jesus, it's the incarnate blood of Jesus given on the cross for our salvation

For such love we, as the Wise Men, worship the Lord Jesus Christ, and thank God for our specialness to him

Prayers

-Father God, our creator and carer, we praise you that you value us so much - you love us and have a plan for our lives. From birth, through childhood and into adulthood you are working for our good, and we praise you.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

-We pray for those who have been separated from their families though death in warfare and natural disasters; for all parents who have been separated from their children, and children separated from their parents.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

-We pray for babies who have been abandoned, and those taken into care, who feel unwanted and unloved. Help those who work to provide care for children in orphanages and in the community like the Children's Society, Spurgeon's, and Dr Barnado's homes. and for all adoption agencies Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

-We pray for those who have aborted their babies, legally and illegally, and now feel a great sense of loss and guilt. We also pray for those who lost a baby or child and who feel bereft. And for those who have longed for a child but never had one. Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

-We pray for teachers coping with 'special needs' children in their schools; for all counsellors and Social Workers We thank you for Adoption Societies, and for couples that welcome children into their families

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Lord you have a special place in your heart for orphans. Your Word says that you put the lonely in families. We thank you for the family of the church and ask that you would make us mindful of the needs of other, and to be supporters, encouragers, and comforters of all those who are 'lost' socially or spiritually

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Thank you God that we can call you Abba, Father and together can pray the family prayer Jesus taught us to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that 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

Song: Amazing grace *By John Newton* v1,3, 5

1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.
2. Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come
'Tis grace that brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home.
3. When we've been there 10,000 year, bright shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you his peace and

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you this day, and until we see Jesus, and then for evermore **Amen**

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