

CHRISTMAS 1B

Isaiah 61: 10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40.

Additional resources for Christmas 1B: *KINDLY LIGHT*, Frank Andersen MSC, Spectrum Publications P/L, Richmond, Victoria 3121, Australia, 1992; *AUSTRALIAN PRAYERS*, Bruce Prewer, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, South Australia, 1983.

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Based on Isaiah 61: 10,11.*

As seeds are transformed into green shoots when they stretch upwards towards the sun; So our lives are transformed when we are exposed to the light which has entered the world in Jesus Christ. Through him, we are blessed and robed with righteousness and clothed with the garments of salvation. Rejoice with our whole being as we join heaven and nature to sing of the wonders of God's love.

TIS 268: "Joy to the world"

OPENING PRAYER: Either read Psalm 148 responsively *or use the following based on Psalm 148*

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens and in the heights;

the angels, the sun, moon and shining stars.

Praise the Lord who established heaven and earth and everything within them;

every animal and bird, every fish and creature of the seas;

every mountain and hill, every tree and plant,

every river and stream, praise the Lord

Praise the Lord every ruler and government,

all people of every age and every colour.

Praise the Lord whose name alone is exalted,

whose glory the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace,

goodwill among all people."

A WORD WITH THE CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE

Invite them to tell about and/or show any gifts received for Christmas. Ask what might have been one of the first words they said on receiving such gifts. Hopefully it may have been 'thanks' - ask then what other ways or words we might use to express our thanks - hug, phone calls, emails, write letters, thank you cards etc. However we do it, we are expressing our appreciation for something that we are thankful for. In the Bible we often hear a word which means just that - it was repeated a number of times in the Psalm we just read/heard. Ask if anyone knows what the word is - 'praise' - and explain that it's the word used to say a special thank you to God for all the wonderful gifts that God gives us - ask what would be the very special gift that we would want to praise God for today - more even than all these lovely gifts you've told us about/shown us. Hopefully they'll say the birth of Jesus. Unlike some gifts we receive - this gift lasts forever, that's why we say or sing praises to God not just at Christmas but all year long. We praise God with our voices as we sing :

TIS 301: "The first Nowell"

TIS 303: "Hark! the herald angels sing"

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND ADORATION

Gracious and loving God, with the angels, the shepherds and the wise men, we too sing praises to the new born King, ever marvelling at the greatness of your love for us. A love prepared to take on our flesh and be born in the humblest of circumstances. Each year, the breadth of your love brings forth from us a response of praise as we sing traditional carols and as we hear familiar words of scripture. We praise you for your great gift of love - Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord - who brings to birth in us love for you, O God, and love for one another. Accept, we pray, our prayers and praises for we make them in Jesus' name. Amen

EPISTLE: Galatians 4: 4 -7

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Forgive us, O God, if we are glad that Christmas Day is over for another year.

Forgive us for shaping Christmas into a commercially driven spending spree - in contrast to what happened at Bethlehem in such simple and humble surroundings.

Forgive us when we forget that simplicity as we strive for bigger and better.

Forgive us, O God and grasp us anew with the wonder and the joy of the birth of Christ and help us to understand that the most precious gifts of all are not those which are credit card-costly but those which arise from Christ-centred lives.

(silent reflection)

Even when we do temporarily forget the true reason for the Christmas season and find our attention drawn to other than Jesus, he does not do that to us. God sent Jesus into the world not to judge us, but to save us. The great good news is this: In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

GOSPEL: Luke 2: 22- 40

MEDITATION ON THE GOSPEL:

An elderly man and woman could perhaps act out the meditation as it is being narrated.

Faithful Simeon, today, as every day, commits the day and himself to God. But this day was to be different Oh, how different! As he mouthed familiar words of praise and longing a holy thought spirited itself into his brain making his heart pound, his breath catch. He paused, eyes and mouth united in a wondrous smile. For he heard God whisper - 'Today, Simeon, today will be a Messiah'd day the fulfillment of your constant dreams and your patient hopes.

Hurry, Simeon, hurry to the Temple... Did passers by stop and stare at an old man scurrying, his face alight - (some said it glowed) could they tell that his labouring heart and trembling legs were on a labour of love?

And an aged woman was struck by the same insight interrupting her daily devotions in the Temple, in the space that some had labelled 'the widow's place' because no one could ever remember Anna not being there. Conversing with God, fasting and praying, waiting, like Simeon with a life pointed towards a Messiah - filled future. So she too, on shaky legs and God-directed, rheumaticky feet, shuffled expectantly to that meeting with destiny.

Simeon, Anna, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, a God-fearing aged pair meeting child-proud, law-abiding parents and the child - the Child. The elders savoured the moment - the highlight of their lives.

Simeon held out love-strong arms and took the Child and blessed him with choking voice and joy smeared face. Now, NOW, 'my eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord' he rejoiced - 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' Now, NOW, I can die in peace, knowing that I have feasted my eyes on the Messiah.

But as their paths crossed on that special day did a cross shaped image impose itself on Simeon's vision? Causing fear to clutch his heart and he looked with compassion on Mary 'Your child', he paused, the smile gone, but tears still there, 'will pierce your heart with pain and cause division among people.'

Handing this special child back to his surprised parents, he blessed them and with turmoiled thoughts - withdrew. And yet, an unusual sense of satisfaction and peace settled on his weary bones.

And Anna? Anna couldn't keep quiet - even her arms seemed filled with new life as she lifted them high to praise God and to share her Good News with the curious crowd drawn by her ecstatic behaviour.

‘Now!’ says Simeon. ‘Praise God!’ cries Anna. As we hear their story today may we have a like response to the Good News of Jesus’ birth. Now! Praise God! NOW!

KINDLY LIGHT, Page 37f.: “The Song of Simeon”

TIS 210/AHB141: “O for a thousand tongues ...” AHB tune 223 (2) Lyngham

TIS 319/AHB 241: “Child in the manger”

PRAYERS: ‘For Faith’ Page 110 and ‘Remembering the Needy at Christmas’ Page 41 in *AUSTRALIAN PRAYERS*

THE LORD’S PRAYER

OFFERING

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Loving God, out of your great love for the world, you have given us so much. We respond by offering these gifts and our lives to spread the Good News of Jesus’ birth. We pray that you will empower us with your Spirit to be faithful witnesses like Simeon and Anna, praising your name now and forever. Amen

TIS 290/AHB 215 : “Of the Father’s love begotten”

TIS 309/AHB 235: “Angels from the realm of glory”

TIS 322/AHB 246: “The North wind is tossing the leaves”

BENEDICTION:

May the love of God bless you and keep you;

the peace of Jesus Christ take root in your hearts;

and the Holy Spirit bring hopes and dreams to reality in your lives.