

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

3 January 2021 - New Year

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! You may possibly notice a few subtle differences in the style of this Sunday service sheet as we begin the new year, because I am using a new computer programme to produce it. Technology always moves on and it was time to upgrade the software. Hopefully it will now be easier for those of you reading on a computer screen or other device, because each A5 page is separate. If you usually print out the sheet, you will need to use the Booklet print option in the Adobe Acrobat Reader print menu to get the same outcome as before. The new software will make writing projects far less complicated in the future. It might take a little getting used to but it is straightforward enough, and after a while it will be just like nothing has changed at all.

That's the thing about change. Whether its good change or bad change, we soon get used to it, it becomes normal. Well, there are certainly changes that have taken place over the last year that I really don't want to get used to. Not being able to share together with others in large groups, whether for worship or fellowship or just to share our common humanity, is certainly one of those things - and we really shouldn't. However there are other changes that I really hope we will have got used to and will have become normal. And I'm not even referring to technology here, although the fact that our Monday prayer meetings are now regularly double the size by Zoom than they were in person, is certainly not going to be reversed in a

hurry. Despite not being able to use our building, we have discovered other ways to communicate, take care of each other, to pray and to worship. Many of these have added extra qualities or value to our life together, and we will not want to let them go. Many of us have discovered new gifts and skills that we must not lose, others have gained a sense of confidence, insight or resilience that we didn't know we had, may have been surprised by, and for which we thank God. If we are looking forward to the year ahead reversing the year just gone, and that things will return to how they always were, we will surely be disappointed and will have squandered the blessings that God has given us.

The year ahead is not a blank canvas. Our financial deficit continues to grow, and we will have to face the fact that our building is now as much a liability as an asset. We will need to think and act decisively regarding the viability of Ryde Baptist Church as we have known it in recent years. The coronavirus pandemic has only hastened the need for such an important discussion. Who are we as a church and what is the Lord's vision for us as a part of His Body in 2021? Blank canvas or not, the year ahead is certainly full of hope and promise. Emmanuel, God is with us. He has promised never to leave nor forsake us. We will have to decide whether we are going to remain in step with Him, by the Spirit, taking the creative opportunities that open up before us, in full obedience to the one who does a new thing, who makes all things new. Happy New Year!

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet at this time and will continue to be the main way that we will be able to meet for a little while yet, particularly now that we are in Tier 4. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 10.30am today, and our Zoom Prayer Meeting is at 7pm on Monday. The Zoom links will be sent to those who have signed up to receive them. If you'd like us to send you the links, please let us know. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can also click on the readings and songs. There is more information on our website at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14](#)

[Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

[Matthew 2:1-12](#)

[Ephesians 3:1-12](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

SONGS

[God Rest You Merry Gentlemen](#)

[Go Tell It On The Mountain](#)

FOR REFLECTION

We probably started last year a little too over-confidently and quite rightly we may want to be more tentative and careful, as if walking on eggshells, this year. Yet there were many blessings last year, and we can be confident and hopeful as we put our

faith and trust in God for the days ahead, whatever they may hold. I commend to you the following exercise:

Take a piece of paper and divide it into two columns, head the left side GRATEFUL and the right side HOPEFUL. Now spend some time prayerfully considering and listing all the things that you are grateful for during the last twelve months. Then go on to spend time prayerfully considering all the things that you are hopeful for looking to the twelve months ahead. You may find yourself going back and forth between the two lists. Now put the paper where you can review it regularly.

PRAYER

'O God who changest not with changing years, we, creatures of time, look back along the road we have come. We thank thee for all thy loving kindness and tender mercies along the way. When the road has been dark thou hast not failed us, though we have often failed thee. Forgive us and help us to do better.

'We look forward, knowing not what may befall in the year that has just begun. Help us to live a day at a time, to trust thee as much in the shadow as in the sunshine and to find our way by the light of thy will.

'O thou who art both guide and goal, whose companionship is our stay and strength, go with us, we pray thee, into the New Year and bring us at last to our journey's end in peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

[Leslie D Weatherhead, 1883-1975]

SONG

[As With Gladness Men Of Old](#)

[I Give You My Heart](#)

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

There is something mysterious about the Magi, and we all like a mystery. Contrasted against the down-to-earth ordinariness of the shepherds, even the word Magi has an air to it that the traditional translation Wise Men fails to convey. Who were these people? Certainly not Kings, and not necessarily three - the number obtained from the gold, frankincense and myrrh they brought as gifts. Where were they from? The east could be anywhere. Tradition places their origin as Persia, across the desert, possibly Zoroastrians; but a little knowledge of local trade routes and contemporary culture makes Nabataeans from Petra, whose commercial paths crossed the deserts of the Negev and whose daily life and spirituality was navigated by the stars, a possibility. The Kings Highway from North Africa ran by Petra up the east of the Dead Sea and the River Jordan, from where they would only need to head west near Jericho to begin the ascent to Jerusalem or Bethlehem nearby.

The Light Shines In The Darkness. From the earliest times human beings learnt that the most effective form of long distance navigation was to follow the stars. If you have ever visited the Royal Observatory in Greenwich you will have seen the displays that chart the history of navigation and the development of global time-keeping. The link between the stars in heaven and the watch on your wrist is direct. Time and space are connected. To know where you are, and what time it is, is essential to the bigger picture. So the light of the rising, mid-day, and setting sun marked the day. And the moon and stars marked the night. They could be tracked and traced like an ancient Sat Nav system. All this lies behind what the story tells us.

Travel In Time And Space. From here it was only a short leap, for great minds like Einstein, to make greater connections as they explored the nature of light, and time and space. Many of the early mathematicians and scientists, like Newton, were Christians who examined creation in detail, always asking questions, wanting to know more about God and how he acts and moves in this world. All to the glory of God. Awe and mystery are at the heart of scientific exploration and discovery. They are essential ingredients in the laboratory, just as much as they are to the study of God's Word, to worship, and to prayer. There is so much evidence in the Bible that examining creation leads to devotion to the creator. Biblical worship does not worship the sun and the stars, but sees them as gifts of the God who made them, by which we navigate this life.

Looking Through The Lens. Whether staying up late to peer through a telescope into the night sky, or getting up early to visit the hide and see through binoculars the stirring avian activity of a new day, looking at creation through a lens can be a great way to put life into perspective and get a new devotional angle on who God is and what he has done. Many of us will remember school days, looking down the shaft of a microscope and discovering in wonder the beauty of the cell structures from which physical life is built. Opening the Bible should be just like peering through a lens. As we look and gaze we see God and life and ourselves in greater detail and with an essential perspective. In fact, navigating our lives through the pages of an open Bible and the light of the Living Word revealed to us within them, is an essential ingredient of our Christian lives, whether last thing at night, first thing in the morning, or any time of day.

Putting The Puzzle Together. As we study the Bible this morning we see all the clues needed to solve the mystery. The light shines. Even as Solomon prays for himself in Psalm 72, he betrays the Messianic hope that God has set in place; Solomon may long for the fruits of heaven and earth to be brought to him, but they are reserved by God for his Son, the king of kings. Solomon might pray for himself, ‘May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him’; but that role belongs to the Saviour, the only one who can fully ‘deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.’ The gifts from far-flung exotic eastern nations are not meant for human worship, but to lay at the feet of God’s Messiah, his Son.

Now the prophet Isaiah joins the chorus. Light is shining in a dark land. Its the same picture that Solomon paints, but now the far-off eastern nations assemble to worship the Messiah. ‘Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.’ The arrival of the Magi to worship the newborn king of the Jews will have been no surprise. They saw it in the stars, but the expectation had been planted in Scripture since the beginning. Hence the alarm and reaction from Herod the Great once all became clear.

The Administration Of The Mystery. Until the light was switched on, the evidence joined together, ‘this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things’ was unknown. But now the freely given gift of God’s grace has been ‘revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members to-

gether of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.’ In Ephesians Paul makes it clear what a privilege he has of making this mystery known, ‘the mystery made known to me by revelation.’

The thing that most of us love about a mystery is being let in on the secret. To the shepherds and the Magi, the humble and majestic, the Jew and the Gentile, the mystery is revealed. It is a secret no longer. There is no magic circle. And it is now our responsibility to make this known to all people, all ‘rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ Through our worship and witness we have the task of revealing the mystery, that ‘In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.’ The light much needed by this dark world has been switched on.

SONG

[Crown Him With Many Crowns](#)

PRAYER

‘For all the possibilities ahead in this new year make us thankful, O Lord. Give us wisdom, courage, and discernment in the face of so much chaos, despair, and fear. Help us to see how, in our circumstances, we can contribute towards peace, faith and love. And give us the will to translate our desires into actions.’

[John Charles Vockler, 1924-2014]

BLESSING

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. Amen.

<https://rydebaptist.xyz>