

Call to worship: words from Psalm 148.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! ...Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples... Praise the Lord!

Hymn StF 99, HP 329: All creatures of our God and King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF12LkUS25c>

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| <p>1 All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
thou silver moon with softer gleam:
<i>O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!</i></p> <p>2 Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia!
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice;
ye lights of evening, find a voice:
<i>O praise him...</i></p> <p>3 Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for thy Lord to hear,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Thou fire, so masterful and bright,
that givest us both warmth and light:
<i>O praise him...</i></p> <p>4 Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
let them his glory also show:
<i>O praise him...</i></p> | <p>5 All ye that are of tender heart,
forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye, alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God, and on him cast your care:
<i>O praise him...</i></p> <p>6 And thou, most kind and gentle death,
waiting to hush our latest breath,
O praise him, alleluia!
Thou leadest home the child of God,
and Christ our Lord the way has trod:
<i>O praise him...</i></p> <p>7 Let all things their creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness;
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:
<i>O praise him...</i></p> |
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- St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)
translated William Henry Draper (1855-1933) alt.*

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Creator God, the whole earth reveals your infinite care and love for all your hand has fashioned. You give form, light and colour, depth and shadow, to the vast mountains, infinite skies, rushing rivers and distant jungles, which all team with abundant life. You give birth to sound and music, the rhythm of the seasons, the warmth of the sun and life-giving rain. You give harmony: the largest and most impressive forms of life dependent upon the smallest. Everything demonstrates your wisdom.

In our ignorance and pride we forget our dependence and exploit your gift; we overlook your personal revelation of who you are in Jesus, and take for granted his love, death, and eternal life. May we seek you in all things, in all life, in all creation, and find in their depths that new life which is your enduring presence, around us, within us, before us and behind. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who 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

Reading: Philippians 4.4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let

your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Address: Rejoice!

Rejoice! What does this mean, exactly? It's one of those words which we hear in church and know has something to do with being happy, and praising God. But I don't always feel like that!

Imagine that you're a mountain...



You're old – older than any life on earth. You're immense, solid, grand in every way. You get chilly on top – that bit is often above the snow line and even the clouds, but lower down you provide sunny meadows, clear lakes, and forests.

How do you, as a mountain, praise God? How do you rejoice? Our opening psalm says that the mountains praise the Lord. How, exactly? You do it simply by being; being solid and immense and grand; by providing a place for the snow, for the meadows and forests and abundant life, for encouraging the rain to fall on one side and for providing shelter from it on the other. You rejoice simply by being the mountain God created you to be, and not needing to be more than a mountain. You know who you are and you know it's enough. Just that causes your mountain heart to be joyful.

We have Jesus, and that's enough, because Jesus teaches us that we can rely on God, who made us, to have filled us with everything we need. Wanting nothing, we can only rejoice!

Let us pray: we thank you God for making each one of us just as we are. It's enough! You love what you have crafted in us and see that it is good. Teach us to see all that we have and are in your sight, to realise that it is everything we could ever wish for. Our hearts are full and running over. Amen.

**Hymn HP 353: With wonder, Lord, we see your works
(Alternative from Singing the Faith 15: The Splendour of the King)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm7TX0Xt4Xc>

1. With wonder, Lord, we see your works,
we see your glory there displayed,
below, above, in all that is
in beauty made.
2. With wonder, Lord, we see your works,
and childlike in our joy we sing
to praise you, bless you, Maker, Lord
of everything.

3. The stars that fill the skies above,
the sun and moon which give our light,
are your designing for our use
and our delight.

5. All you have made is ours to rule,
the birds and beasts at will to tame,
all things in order for the glory
of your name.

4. We praise your works, yet we ourselves
are works of wonder made by you,
not far from you in all we are
And all we do.

Brian Foley (1919-2000)

Introduction to the theme

At our Circuit Meeting last month, which some of you attended, we were invited to listen to that reading from Philippians we heard earlier, and then share with our neighbour the one point that stood out to us. My partner observed that we have forgotten how to rejoice: that to do so involves a certain amount of letting go, and we have somehow not managed that well since the disturbance to our local and national lives caused by COVID. As individuals and as churches we are burdened with financial worries, health concerns, anxiety about the survival of our churches. For them, for each other, and for God, we need to relearn the practice of rejoicing.

Where better to start than to look at the world that God has created, which, according to the Psalmist with whom we started our service today (Psalm 148), praises God simply by being. Therefore, today we rejoice in God's creation! Lord, how your wonders are displayed where'er I turn mine eye; if I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky! And in our gospel, Jesus bids us do just that: consider the lilies of the field, the birds of the sky...

Reading: Matthew 6.25-33

²⁵Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Hymn StF 107; HP 334: I sing the almighty power of God

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r0_7KxM8E8

1. I sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad,
and built the lofty skies.

4. Lord, how thy wonders are displayed
where'er I turn my eye;
if I survey the ground I tread,
or gaze upon the sky!

2. I sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at God's command,
and all the stars obey.

5. God's hand is my perpetual guard
he guides me with his eye;
why should I then forget the Lord,
whose love is ever nigh?

3. I sing the goodness of the Lord
that filled the earth with food;
he formed creatures with his word,
and then pronounced it good.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Sermon – Consider the birds of the air, the lilies of the field

"Rejoice in the Lord always", cries Paul. And he repeats himself, "Rejoice!"

But I don't always feel much like rejoicing. Life's tough. Money's short. There's trouble in the family, with friends. Then there are the warring nations, displaced peoples, climate crisis, strikes... there are so many reasons to be truly worried and upset.

Jesus was well aware that life can get to be too much. We're not always able to be happy; we're pulled in too many competing directions. Just before the passage we heard from Matthew's gospel, Jesus is recorded as saying, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6.24). If you get pulled too far in opposing directions, in the end you will break! Putting a on brave face will only get us so far, and sometimes we find that the anxieties and pressures of the world have pulled us so far from our necessary grounding in Christ that we really can't cope any more.

Jesus' advice is this: "Consider the birds of the air", and "Consider the lilies of the field". For they neither labour nor fret, and God has kept them in life and clothed them in glory! His point is that they don't need anything more than they have; they have enough. And, with the psalmist of Psalm 148, we see them praising God simply by being and God created them to be. We are advised to see them, too, in the same way. Majestic; of God; and praising God.

We are invited to be! Not to be spectacular, super-Christians; not to be successful; not to be popular, or wealthy... we are invited to be, just as God creates us to be. And Jesus' advice on how to be is to open your eyes, to look beyond you, seeing God in everything outside your own limited sphere of existence.

Paul too! If we might read beyond the short section in Philippians ch. 4 we read earlier, a call to rejoice in God always, and not to be anxious, we find: "Beloved, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Philippians 4.8). Paul, too, is bidding us to open our eyes, to look beyond ourselves, and to see what God has accomplished in the true, noble and pure which is all around us, if only we'd notice.

I met God on a bridge once. It was many years ago, and I was on my summer break from university and working on a placement I wasn't particularly enjoying. It was a hot day, and I was tired, down in the dumps, and generally feeling sorry for myself. I'd come off the train from London and was walking home. My route took me across a small stream, and I slumped down, leaning on the railing and looking into the water flowing below. And the birds sang to me. It was like the first time I'd heard them. They caused me to listen, to focus on not me, but on something else; something pure and true and noble. I began to put my worries aside, to be... to be in the moment, with God; to be loved; beloved.

The praise intrinsic in all of creation had caused me to praise. Praise is outward-looking. We see creation as praising God the creator because that sense of joy in being projects towards us in the glory of the song, beauty, solidity, fragility it was created to exhibit. It moved me from being inwardly anxious to outwardly praising. As the psalmist exclaimed, "Let all heavenly beings and everything on earth praise God, for his name alone is exalted; for he commended and they were created!" (from Psalm 148) We rejoice, not because we feel happy, but because God is God and you are you: created by God, beloved of God. It is the very nature of things: God is great, immense, unimaginatively majestic; and yet, God loves you.

We rejoice in order to remind ourselves of God's providence and care. Both Jesus and Paul tell us, when they bid us to look beyond ourselves, not to worry, not to be anxious and afraid. God created you, holds you, loves you... what more do you need? Our biggest problem can be that we overthink us and underthink God. And to look beyond at what God has made, in all its perfect beauty and grandeur, our balance is reset. Even in the harshest urban environment where the trees don't grow and the birds don't sing and there is too much concrete, we can still look upwards and outwards at the colours of the sky, the clouds, the infinity of the universe. We rejoice because it heals us and brings us back to where we belong: into God's embrace.

There is no better place to start than with God's creation. Praise is at the core of all created beings. Within each one is the flame of abundant life, which is God. And God is a constant in our lives when all else is changing. We rejoice in response to that constancy rather than in response to our feelings and circumstances, which left unattended might just draw us away from God. And in looking at the birds of the air, and lilies of the field, the mountains and skies and everything pure, true and noble, our perspective is broadened to its widest possible view. We're looking out from our lives and only then finding God who dwells within, and then cannot help but rejoice.

One of the most striking moments of the television show *The Vicar of Dibley* was the unveiling of the new church window. Fundraising hadn't gone to plan and other problems had drawn money away, and when

the window was unveiled for the first time a plain glass infill was revealed, rather than the stained glass masterpiece which would have been in keeping with the other church windows. Everyone agreed, however, that this window was the best and most soul-lifting because of the view it offered of the village and countryside beyond. As individuals and as the church, we are called to look out from ourselves into our communities and into God's created world, in order to be made whole ourselves. Consider for a moment, what if your church had one of those windows, what would you see? Just outside the walls of our churches are streets, houses, offices, and lots of cars... but there is also sunlight, sky, trees, and many, many people. People of all sorts: poor and rich, young and old, happy and sad... each one God's creation, God's masterpiece, and each one with the flame of the Creator's life within, God on earth. When we encounter any one of them, we encounter God; and when we encounter God, we can but rejoice.

David Wilkinson is a Methodist minister and author, and in his book *The Message of Creation* he writes, "In turning our minds and hearts to an attitude of thankfulness and focussing on the God who provides, we subvert the values of a society that seeks fame and power through greed and selfishness." You cannot serve both God and money; rejoicing, we choose God!

We choose God because praising the name of God is intrinsic in creation and in each one of us; because when we praise God we are reminded of who we really are, and who God is; because our praise is pleasing to God, and God will share that pleasure in us and with us; because God has given us an inexhaustible and wonderful creation to remind us just how to rejoice.

Amen.

**Hymn StF 469: I watch the sunrise lighting the sky
(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms 350: Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JvCmvlm-Qg>

1 I watch the sunrise lighting the sky,
casting its shadows near.
And on this morning bright though it be,
I feel those shadows near me.

*But you are always close to me
following all my ways.
May I be always close to you
Following all your ways, Lord.*

2 I watch the sunlight shine through the
clouds,
warming the earth below.
And at the mid-day, life seems to say:
I feel your brightness near me.

But you are always close to me...

3 I watch the sunset fading away,
lighting the clouds with sleep.
And as the evening closes its eyes,
I feel your presence near me.

But you are always close to me...

4 I watch the moonlight guarding the night,
waiting till morning comes.
The air is silent, earth is at rest –
only your peace is near me.

But you are always close to me...

John Glynn

Prayers of Intercession

Remembering that the COP27 climate summit commences on 7th November, it is not too soon to pray for our country's leaders and those of the world to come together and courageously make a difference. This prayer is sourced from CAFOD, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development.

God of blessings, the universe sings of your glory. Deepen our gratitude for all you have made and awaken in us a renewed commitment to care for the earth and each other. Inspire world leaders at COP27, with openness to listen to those most affected by climate change and with courage to act urgently and wisely, so that our common home may be healed and restored and all people, and generations to come, may delight in it. Amen.

In some moments of silence, shall we make our own petitions to God for the nations, the communities and the individuals for whom we carry a burden of concern...

In Jesus, you have shown us how from beginning to end is the light of love, that as endless as the heavens are above so is the grace that sustains all things, so with the faith that the Spirit has wrought in us, we seek the care every creature is to have, as we dream, hope and labour for a future wrapped in the fullness of joy that your creation brings. Amen.

**Hymn StF 82: O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms 337: O Lord of heaven and earth and sea)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdE_NKyY_o0

- 1 O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
how great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
how great thou art, how great thou art!*
- 2 When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:
Then sings my soul...
- 3 And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die – I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin:
Then sings my soul...
- 4 When Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation
and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim, 'my God, how great thou art!'
Then sings my soul...

Stuart K. Hine (1899-1989)

vv. 1, 2, 4 based on O store Gud by Carl Gustav Boberg (1859-1940)

Blessing

GO! Go, and with the sun and moon, the shining stars, the sea monsters, the fire and hail, snow and frost;
and with the mountains and trees and wild animals and cattle, creeping things and flying birds; go and with
all of God's creation, PRAISE THE LORD!

May you know the enduring friendship of the Christ who died for you, the close companionship of the Spirit
who dwells with you, and the eternal love of God who holds you close, today and every day. Amen.