First Sunday after Christmas – Year B

Sunday 27 December 2026

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Very Rev Colin Sinclair for his thoughts on the first Sunday after Christmas.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

At this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

We worship in the afterglow of Christmas. By the Incarnation, history has been snapped in two. Something decisive has happened by which everything has changed. The four readings for the first Sunday after Christmas are united by the overarching themes of salvation, fulfilment and praise. Together, they help us reflect on the significance of Christ's birth and its impact on the world and on humankind.

God keeps His word. Isaiah looks forward to the restoration of Zion, describing God's people clothed in "garments of salvation" and given a new identity. In Luke's Gospel, this prophetic hope is fulfilled as Simeon and Anna recognise the infant Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Simeon's declaration that his eyes have seen God's salvation shows that the promises made through the prophets are now becoming reality in Christ. Galatians reinforces this by explaining that Jesus came "when the time had fully come," emphasising that God's plan unfolded according to God's perfect timing.

A Saviour is born. Isaiah presents salvation as a gift that restores dignity and righteousness, while Luke reveals Jesus as the one who brings salvation to both Israel and the Gentiles. Paul develops this further in Galatians by explaining that Christ redeems humanity from slavery to sin and the Law, adopting believers into God's family as children and heirs. Salvation therefore involves not only forgiveness but also the creation of a new relationship with God.

Praise also links the readings. Psalm 148 calls on all creation – heaven, earth, animals, rulers, and ordinary people – to praise the Lord. This universal worship reflects the coming of Christ, whose birth is good news for the whole world. Simeon and Anna respond to Jesus with joyful praise, while Isaiah's song of rejoicing echoes the gratitude of those who experience God's saving work.

Finally, we are changed through God's grace. Isaiah speaks of God's people receiving a new name. Galatians declares that believers are adopted as God's children, while Luke presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Together, these passages reveal that through Christ, God's promises are fulfilled – they bring salvation, inspire universal praise and form a people who belong to God and reflect God's glory.

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

The passage begins with a joyful declaration of praise as the speaker rejoices in the Lord because God has clothed them with "garments of salvation" and a "robe of righteousness"

(v10). Just as a bride and bridegroom are beautifully dressed for a wedding, God's people are restored with dignity and joy after a period of suffering and exile.

The prophet describes how righteousness and praise will spring up before all nations, just as plants grow from the earth. God's power is able to bring new life where there was once despair. The restoration is not only spiritual but also public, demonstrating to the surrounding nations that God remains faithfully in covenant with Israel.

God remains committed to Zion. In Isaiah 62:1, the prophet declares that he will not remain silent until Jerusalem's righteousness shines like the dawn and her salvation burns like a blazing torch. Jerusalem is presented as the centre of God's redemptive plan, and its restoration will become a witness to the whole world.

The nations will see Jerusalem's righteousness, and kings will witness its glory. God promises that the people will receive "a new name" (v2), symbolising a new status, purpose, and relationship with God. In the ancient world, receiving a new name often marked a significant change in identity or destiny. Finally, in verse 3, Zion is described as "a crown of splendour" and "a royal diadem" in the Lord's hand. These royal images show how precious and honoured God's people are.

Psalm 148

This is a hymn of praise that calls all creation to worship God. The psalm invites everything in heaven and on earth to glorify the Lord. Angels, heavenly bodies, sea creatures, animals, kings, nations, young and old alike are all called to recognise God's power and majesty. This demonstrates that worship is not limited to Israel but is the responsibility of all creation. The psalm explains that the heavens, sun, moon, stars, and all living creatures exist because God the Creator commanded them into being. God's creative word gives life and order to the universe, and creation continues to exist because it was established by God's decree. This highlights God's authority over everything and reinforces the belief that all creatures depend on God.

The Psalmist deliberately includes both the highest heavens and the deepest parts of the earth, as well as people from every social group. Kings and rulers are mentioned alongside children and the elderly, showing that everyone is equal in the duty to praise God. This reflects the idea that God's care extends to the whole world and that every part of creation has value and purpose.

Wonderfully, the psalm also celebrates God's closeness to the people. Although all creation is called to praise God, the final verses give special attention to Israel, describing them as "the people close to his heart" (NIV). God is praised for raising up a "horn for his people", a symbol of strength, victory, and salvation. God will protect and bless those who remain faithful.

Galatians 4:4-7

Here Paul explains that "when the fullness of time had come," God's Son was sent into the world, showing that Jesus' coming was part of God's perfect plan for human salvation. This emphasises God's control over history and faithfulness in fulfilling the promises God has made.

Paul states that Jesus was "born of a woman, born under the law … to redeem those under the law." This means that Christ shared the human condition and lived under the Jewish Law so that He could free people from its power and the consequences of sin. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, believers are no longer bound by the Law as the means of achieving righteousness. Instead, salvation is received through God's grace and faith in Christ.

Paul explains that believers receive "adoption to sonship," meaning they become members of God's family rather than remaining slaves to sin or the Law. Adoption was a significant legal practice in the Roman world, giving adopted children the full rights and privileges of natural-born heirs. Paul uses this image to show that Christians have a secure relationship – fully accepted as God's children.

The passage also highlights the work of the Holy Spirit. Because believers are God's children, God sends "the Spirit of his Son" into their hearts, enabling them to cry, "Abba, Father." Abba is an intimate term for father, expressing trust, closeness, and love. Christians can approach God with confidence, knowing they have a personal relationship rather than one based on fear or obligation.

Luke 2:22-40

The passage describes Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem according to the requirements of the Jewish Law. Their actions demonstrate their faithfulness and obedience to God, showing that Jesus was raised within the traditions of Israel and that His family honoured God's commandments.

Simeon, a righteous and devout man, had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. When he meets Jesus, he praises God, recognising that God's promise has been fulfilled. His song, often called the *Nunc Dimittis*, declares that he has seen God's salvation. This highlights the belief that Jesus is the long-awaited Saviour sent by God in accordance with Old Testament prophecy.

Simeon goes on to describe Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (v32). This shows that Jesus' mission extends beyond the Jewish people to include all nations. Luke emphasises that God's plan of salvation is for the whole world, making Jesus the source of hope for both Jews and Gentiles.

However, Simeon does not avoid the cost of this coming. He tells Mary that Jesus is destined to cause "the falling and rising of many in Israel" and that a sword will pierce Mary's own soul (vv34-35). These words foreshadow the opposition Jesus will face during His ministry, His-suffering and crucifixion. They also prepare Mary for the sorrow she will experience as Jesus' mother.

The prophetess Anna reinforces these themes by praising God and speaking about Jesus to those who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Her testimony confirms Jesus' significance and shows that faithful believers recognised Him as the promised Messiah.

Sermon ideas

The first Sunday after Christmas is challenging, after the special services and excitement around Christmas itself. For those who have been singing carols for several weeks alarm bells begin to ring, suggesting that they have almost passed their sell-by date. Congregations are often smaller as it is the 'holiday season' and concentration may be limited. However, the readings offer an opportunity to reflect not only on the birth of Christ but also on what His coming means for the life of God's people.

God keeps His word – a promise is a promise and a promise must be kept
We are called to live in the light of fulfilled promises anticipated by Isaiah, which Luke shows are realised in the infant Jesus, and recognised by Simeon and Anna. Christmas is therefore not simply a celebration of a birth but the fulfilment of God's long-awaited promises, reminding believers that God remains faithful even when fulfilment takes time. We are called to put our trust in God and to have patience – neither of which are easy.

Christ's coming changes our relationship with God

Isaiah speaks of God's people being clothed with salvation and righteousness and receiving a new name. Paul develops this in Galatians by teaching that, through Christ, believers are no longer slaves but adopted children and heirs of God. So for us our identity is not found in success, failure, status, or possessions, but in God's grace. The days after Christmas often bring a return to ordinary routines, yet these readings remind Christians that they continue to live as God's beloved children every day of the year. There is no going back! We do not pack away Christmas with the decorations.

Be aware of God at work
Simeon and Anna recognise God's salvation in an ordinary family bringing a child for dedication. Their example challenges Christians to remain spiritually attentive, expecting God to be at work in everyday life and ordinary encounters.

Finish the year with praise
Finally, the readings encourage us to respond gladly to God's saving work. Psalm 148 calls all creation to praise the Creator, while Isaiah begins with joyful rejoicing, and Simeon and Anna respond to Jesus with thanksgiving and witness. Praise is shown not only as words spoken in worship but as a way of life that reflects gratitude, hope, and faithful service. The Christmas season therefore does not end with the celebration of Christ's birth; it continues into the New Year in lives that proclaim Christ's light through worship, compassion, and joyful obedience.

Prayers

- **Call to worship**

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise the Lord from the earth.
Let all creation lift up its voice,
for the Creator has come to dwell among us.
In the fullness of time,
God sent the Son,
that we might no longer be slaves,
but beloved children and heirs of God's kingdom.
Like Simeon and Anna,
let us recognise Christ in our midst,
giving thanks for the light that shines for all nations
and the hope that never fades.

Come, let us worship the Lord,

whose promises are fulfilled,
whose salvation is revealed,
and whose love endures for ever.

- **Opening prayer**

Faithful and gracious God,
We thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ,
born among us in humility
and revealed as the Saviour of the world.
In Him You have fulfilled Your promises,
and welcomed us into Your family as Your beloved children.

As we gather in worship today,
open our eyes to recognise Your presence,
as Simeon and Anna recognised the Christ-child in the Temple.
Fill our hearts with joy and gratitude,
that our praise may join with the song of all creation.
Renew us by Your Holy Spirit,
strengthen our faith,
and shape us to reflect Your light in the world.

May this time of worship draw us closer to You,
deepen our love for one another,
and send us out
to live as witnesses to Your saving grace.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

- **Prayer of Confession**

Merciful God,
who called us to live as Your children,
we confess that we have not always lived
as those who belong to You.

Forgive us when we have failed to recognise Christ in our neighbour,
when we have overlooked those who are lonely, vulnerable, or in need,
and when we have been too busy to see Your presence at work among us.

Forgive us for the times when our words have not reflected Your love,
our actions have not revealed Your justice,
and our lives have not borne witness
to the hope You have given us.

Lord, You call all creation to praise Your holy name,
yet we confess that we are often silent in thanksgiving
and slow to rejoice in Your goodness.
We have taken Your gifts for granted
and forgotten that every good thing comes from Your hand.

Renew us by Your Holy Spirit.
Free us from all that keeps us in bondage to fear, pride, and selfishness.
Remind us that, through Christ, we are no longer slaves
but Your sons and daughters,
called to live in the freedom of Your grace.

Like Simeon and Anna,
give us patient faith to wait upon You,
hearts open to recognising Your salvation,
and ready to proclaim Your goodness.

Forgive us, restore us, and lead us in the way of righteousness,
that our lives may reflect the light of Christ
and bring glory to Your name.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- **Words of assurance**

Hear the good news:
In the fullness of time, God sent the Son to redeem us,
that we might receive adoption as God's children.
If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven, restored,
and made heirs of God's kingdom.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

- **Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Gracious and loving God,
We thank You that, in the fullness of time,
You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ,
to be the Saviour of the world.

We praise You for Your faithfulness through every generation
and for the fulfilment of Your promises in Christ.
Thank You that You have called us Your beloved children,
and welcomed us into Your family through Your grace.

With all creation, we lift our voices in praise.
We join the song of the angels,
the witness of Simeon and Anna,
and the joy of all who have recognised Your saving love.
May our lives continually reflect Your goodness, mercy, and peace.

Loving Lord, we pray for Your Church throughout the world.
Strengthen all who proclaim the good news of Christ,
especially during this season of Christmas.
Help Your people to bear witness to Your light
with humility, compassion, and joy,
so that others may come to know the hope found in Your Son.

We pray for the nations of the world.
Where there is war, bring peace;
where there is injustice, establish righteousness;
where there is division, bring reconciliation.
Guide those who lead governments and communities
with wisdom, integrity, and a sincere desire for the common good.

We remember those who are lonely, grieving, anxious,
or suffering during this Christmas season.
Draw near to those who mourn,
comfort those who are ill,
strengthen those who care for others,
and give hope to all whose burdens feel too heavy to bear.

Help us to recognise Christ in those we meet

and to serve them with generosity and love.

We give thanks for our families, friends, and this community of faith.
Bless our homes with Your peace,
deepen our love for one another,
and help us to live each day as Your faithful children,
reflecting the light of Christ in our words and actions.
Be especially with family and friends
whom we have not been able to see over this Christmas period
but who are never far from our hearts.

As a new year approaches,
grant us grace to trust Your promises,
courage to follow Your calling,
and faith to recognise Your presence wherever you lead us.

These prayers we offer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour,
Amen.

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources, including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all

Our online music resource is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the Songs for Sunday blog from Trinity College Glasgow.

- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 for Christmas can be found on the Church of Scotland website (Christmas) and in GWA 99-105

- GWA 124 – "Living Hope" (Phil Wickham)
- GWA 137 – "King of Kings" (Hillsong Worship)
- GWA 170 – "Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me" (CityAlight)

Opening Hymns
- CH4 290 – "The race that long in darkness pined"
- CH4 297 – "While shepherds watched their flocks by night"
- CH4 305 – "In the bleak midwinter"
- CH4 306 – "O come, all ye faithful"

Response to the Word
- CH4 181 – "For the beauty of the earth"
- CH4 286 – "Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord"
- CH4 448 – "Lord, the light of your love is shining" (Shine, Jesus, Shine)
- CH4 512 – "To God be the glory"

Reflection
- CH4 519 – "Love divine, all loves excelling"
- CH4 532 – "Lord, you have come to the seashore"
- CH4 555 – "Amazing Grace"

Closing Hymns
- CH4 251 – "I, the Lord of sea and sky" (Here I Am, Lord)
- CH4 710 – "I'm accepted, I'm forgiven"
- CH4 786 – "May the God of peace go with us"

Other worship songs
- "Light of the World" (Tim Hughes)
- "Who You Say I Am" (Hillsong Worship)
- "What a Beautiful Name" (Hillsong Worship)
- "The Father's House" (Cory Asbury)
- "Reckless Love" (Cory Asbury)

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
  Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/ intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
  What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?

Did it function well as a whole?
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?

- How balanced was the worship?
  What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
  Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/ community?
  How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
  How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

God Welcomes All can be ordered from Hymns Ancient & Modern

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship here

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