

# twelvebaskets



## CHRISTMAS 1B

A complete Sunday service ready to use  
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

**Christmas 1 - Year B**  
31st December 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**64 STF – Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you OR**

**136 STF – Morning has broken like the first morning**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**190 STF – Angels, from the realms of glory OR**

**199 STF – Glory be to God on high**

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

**Hymn:**

**460 STF – Come, let us anew our journey pursue OR**

**684 STF – Here on the threshold of a new beginning**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**228 STF – Hail to the Lord's Anointed OR**

**229 STF – Mary and Joseph came to the Temple**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus OR**

**330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come!**

Blessing

---

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).

Copyright for content is retained by the original author / contributor.

**[www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com)**

## Call to worship

In the beginning was the Word.

Come amongst us now, dear God, by the grace of the words, the music, the silence and the reflection of the next hour together.

As you were made known to us in the presence of Christ,

May we know your presence amongst us this day,

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

64 STF – Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you OR

136 STF – Morning has broken like the first morning

## Opening Prayers

Divine One, we meet with and before you as individual snowflakes falling into a fresh blanket of snow: unique beings invited into the softness and wonder of something so much bigger than ourselves. We thank you for holding us when the world feels too much for us and for those around us.

Accepting One, we meet with and before you as fresh pieces of paper waiting for an author's first pen-stroke: full of potential and eager to share in the story that will unfold within us. Thank you for loving us through each chapter of our own personal stories. We are sorry for when we don't always write the healthiest narratives for ourselves and for those around us.

Creative One, we meet with and before you today as fresh lumps of clay waiting for a potter's first touch: open and eager for what we will be moulded into and awaiting the reveal of how we might fit together to make a whole. Your forgiveness and grace when we find unexpected cracks within ourselves encourages us to keep moulding, building and giving our best despite what has come before.

Inspiring One, we meet with and before you as first rays of the rising sun peering over the horizon of a new day: full of warmth and anticipation for how our light might merge together to create warmth and hope. Thank you for always bringing the dawn after the night and reminding us that we are loved, just as we are.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## We say together the Lord's Prayer

---

<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

## All Age Talk

*[To do this message you will need to make sure every person has a piece of paper, envelope and a pen].*

As this is the last day before 2024 begins we may find ourselves at the point of the year when we like to think of New Year's resolutions. These are, as the dictionary says, "a firm decision made on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day to do or refrain from doing something over the course of the coming year." Maybe you have some already in your mind? Maybe you have stopped making these because you realise they never last.

Well today, we are going to do something different as we look forward to 2024. Each one of you has a piece of paper, envelope and a pen *[wave these and distribute if needed]*.

What I want you to do is write a letter to your future self to open in a year's' time, or draw a picture that will help or inspire you a year from now. What you write is entirely up to you. However, I encourage you to maybe write or draw some of your hopes for 2024 maybe for yourself or for your family or loved ones.

However, the idea behind doing this is so that you have something you can open in a year's' time open to look back on so that you can see how God has guided and protected you.

*[Assure the congregation that these will be stored safely and that they should place a name on the outside of the envelope and an address just in case they have moved on from the church. Then you will need to ensure they are available in December 2024!]*

*Give five minutes for them to write these letters, and collect them in once completed. You could play some music while this happens].*

Now I hope each one of you has written your letter, if you haven't then I encourage you to do so at the end of the service.

Let us pray.

God of all grace, and of fresh starts, God who travels with us on our journey - we thank you for all your goodness and protection that you give to us. We ask that you might grant us protection this year ahead and be with our hopes and dreams in 2024. Might we be encouraged and drawn closer to your presence by opening these letters in a year's' time.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### Hymn:

190 STF – Angels, from the realms of glory OR

199 STF – Glory be to God on high

**Readings:** Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

### Hymn:

460 STF – Come, let us anew our journey pursue OR

684 STF – Here on the threshold of a new beginning

---

<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

## Reflections on the readings

In today's passage from Isaiah we read: *'you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.'*

Simeon and Anna are similarly blessed by their encounter with the infant Jesus – 'newness' reaches them, in their old age.

As we stand on the cusp of a new year, these Bible stories bring to mind a line from Psalm 85:

*I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people. But let them not return to their foolish ways.*

I don't know about you, but that line always makes me think of New Year's Resolutions. We start the year with the best intentions, and set ourselves the loftiest of goals. Are we going to lose half our body weight by May? Are we going to start a punishing gym routine? Are we going to start keeping a journal, committing to at least five full pages per day? In the vast majority of cases, it's not too long before we "return to our foolish ways", and settle back into old habits.

There's this incredible temptation to take on the "New Year, New Me" mantle, and make dramatic changes to our lives. In and of itself, it's not a bad idea. We all have improvements we can make to the way we live, and it's good to use the beginning of the year as an opportunity to do just that; we have a 'clean slate', and a duty to begin a new year on the right footing. However, how many of us set the bar far too high? How many of us set ourselves goals that, deep down, we know not to be sustainable? Far too often, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and we wind up feeling terrible about ourselves because we were unable to live up to our wildly unreasonable demands.

Simeon and Anna encounter this radical change in their lives very late – but it doesn't motivate a 'fad diet' in them, rather a deep contentment with who they are and their ministry coming to an end.

I can't help but feel that our shame takes the wheel at this time of year. We use the notion of, 'New Year, New Me' to pick ourselves apart and jab at the aspects we're ashamed of. We've been telling ourselves for years - decades, even - that we eat too much, or don't eat the right things. We watch too much reality TV. We drink too much. Of course, it's ok to recognise there are aspects of our lifestyles that are harming us, and that there are changes we can make in order to improve our health and boost our mood, but we take this to dreadful extremes around this time of year. These things become sticks we can beat ourselves with, driving our self-esteem into the ground as we bemoan our apparent lack of willpower.

As we prepare to welcome 2024, perhaps it's time to pause and take stock. Let's take a moment to hear this verse from the psalmist again:

*I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people.*

But let them not return to their foolish ways.

The Lord speaks peace to his faithful people.

We hear it like a whisper on the breeze.

Peace.

Peace be with you.

My peace I leave with you.

May the Lord look upon you with favour, and grant you peace.

May we feel the peace of God gently cascading over us, and let us not return to our foolish ways: our lofty expectations; our shame-driven diets; our cold-turkey attitude to a new year.

Let us, instead, enter this new year with peace. Let us bring to mind the prophecy of John the Baptist, who calls for us to prepare the way for the Prince of Peace.

Let us learn to be at peace with ourselves.

Let us learn to be at peace with one another.

We can take our time. We can get to know ourselves and the small steps we may need to take in order to overcome a hurdle. We can accept and learn to love the things about ourselves that society tells us we should loathe, instead of letting our shame rob us of our joy.

May this New Year's celebration be a time for starting afresh, but in the sure knowledge that we are loved, and enough just as we are.

Perhaps a New Year's Resolution is a nice idea, but let's turn away from self-hatred and set ourselves a challenge that encourages us to look outwards.

At the beginning of this new year, may we challenge ourselves to be more open-minded.

May we take time to reach out to a friend with whom we've lost contact.

May we practice and advocate for self-care and self-love in a way that empowers others to do the same.

May we love radically, and bravely stand for justice in all the ways we can.

May we remember that we are all precious children of God, and may that knowledge transform the way we view ourselves, as well as those we meet.

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

228 STF – Hail to the Lord's Anointed OR

229 STF – Mary and Joseph came to the Temple

### **Prayers of intercession**

*All:*

**Divine Love, soothe our hearts with water from the cool streams of your mercy;  
Pour kindness deep into our bones so that generosity for ourselves  
and for others springs abundant.**

*Lead:*

For those lost, may their way be lit back to shelter;

For those lonely, may companions rise to meet them on their journey;

For those grieving, may avenues present themselves for continuing to share their enduring love beyond the grave.

**Divine Love, soothe our hearts with water from the cool streams of your mercy;  
Pour kindness deep into our bones so that generosity for ourselves  
and for others springs abundant.**

For those in physical pain, may comfort surround them as a blanket;

For those in mental pain, may respite bathe over them as a candle's golden glow;

---

<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Emma Dobson

For those with broken hearts, may healing rise from the ashes of their pain and despair.

**Divine Love, soothe our hearts with water from the cool streams of your mercy;  
Pour kindness deep into our bones so that generosity for ourselves  
and for others springs abundant.**

For those caught up in war, may safety step forwards from inside the darkness;  
For those caught up in fighting, may compassion surpass empire,  
For those with heavy hearts at the world's latest news, may they not lose hope.

**Divine Love, soothe our hearts with water from the cool streams of your mercy;  
Pour kindness deep into our bones so that generosity for ourselves  
and for others springs abundant.**

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

**We will now take up the offering.**

God of all grace, Lord of all love  
We commend to you these gifts, that we may use them, and all the many gifts we have  
received from you, for the glory of your Kingdom, as we enter this new year and beyond.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

**Hymn:**

169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus OR

330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

**Blessing**

As you go out into this new year, may you be encouraged and inspired by your encounter  
with the Spirit of God,

As you face difficult times and joyful moments in 2024, may God be your guide and your  
companion

And may you know the miracle of Immanuel, God with us.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Hannah Baker

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker