

**Wednesday Worship**  
**13th January 2021**  
**New beginnings**

**Opening prayers and lighting of a candle**

God of ever-new beginnings,  
God in whom past, present and future perpetually combine,  
as a new year unfolds before us,  
through the dark days of January,  
through the difficulties of bad weather,

though storm, flood or ice may unsettle us,  
though fear of illness may make us anxious,  
though world events may disturb us,  
though personal difficulties may beset us,

help us always to remember  
that your light shines through the deepest darkness,  
that your love surrounds and summons us,  
that your life is stronger than death itself,  
and that your grace sustains us  
and is sufficient for all our needs.

**All** Amen.

**Hymn: God is working his purpose out**

**A litany of hope**

As long as earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,  
summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

(Genesis 8.22)

The trees of the wood await spring's re-clothing;  
the branches will be green again.

**All** **This we affirm: God is faithful and true.**

The sun will rise higher in our skies;  
its light will be warm upon our faces once more.

**All** **This we affirm: God is faithful and true.**

The days will grow longer:  
light will push back the darkness.

**All** **This we affirm: God is faithful and true.**

Seeds will germinate and grow;  
the flowers will bud and bloom.

**All** **This we affirm: God is faithful and true.**

The ears of the wheat will form and ripen;  
the grass will grow to feed the cattle.

*All*     **This we affirm: God is faithful and true.**

Swallows will return and fill the skies;  
birds will fill the land with song.

*All*     **This we affirm: God is faithful and true.**

### *1st Reading: Isaiah 43.1-3, 18-21*

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

### *Prayer of response*

Loving Shepherd of the sheep,  
thank you for your gracious promises,  
not only to Israel but to your new creation in Christ.  
Thank you that you are faithful to all your children,  
in the name of Christ.

*All*     **Amen.**

### *Psalm 121*

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
He who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.

### **Prayer of response**

Lord, ever watchful and faithful,  
we look to you to be our defence  
in the days, weeks and months of this new year,  
and we lift our hearts to know your help;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

### **2nd Reading: Revelation 21.1-7**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.’

### **Prayer of response**

Father, we know that you hold all things in your hands,  
and we trust our lives to you today,  
knowing that you are with us in every trial and pain we face,  
even when we don't always understand what is happening.  
In Jesus' name we pray.

All **Amen.**

### **Hymn: Source and fount of all creation**

### **3rd Reading: John 3.1-8**

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’

## Prayer of response

Dear Lord, we thank you  
that no one who comes to you seeking understanding  
is ever turned away.

Help us to understand and grasp  
the new life that you offer so freely,  
that we too may be filled with the Spirit.

All **Amen.**

## Reflection

I think it was the writer and journalist Katherine Whitehorn who once said (with more wit than Christian charity):

“Why is it that born-again people are so often the sort of people you wish had never been born the first time around?”

I suspect she was talking generally about the zeal of the newly converted, but for many people the phrase “Born Again Christian” conjures up an image of a hard-line, extremely conservative type of Christian towards the fundamentalist end of the theological spectrum. And this is sad because the idea of being born again in the Spirit is a something that should be very meaningful for all Christians.

It’s also at the heart of our reading today about Nicodemus’ meeting with Jesus.

Nicodemus was a senior and well-respected religious leader who visited Jesus by night.

We don’t know why he came then but maybe he was thinking:

“I’m here in the dark and the problem is that I’ve studied hard, prayed hard, kept all the rules, and taught others to do the same, but somehow it’s not enough. Somehow, I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.”

Jesus then comes back with an unexpected and confusing answer: you’ve got to be born again, born from above.

You need a spiritual birth to parallel your original birth.

Jesus’ analogy for spiritual renewal is being born.

So, think for a minute.

How do you go about getting physically born?

What do you actually do?

It’s a silly question, really, because being born isn’t something you do at all.

It’s done for you.

There’s a lot of work involved, and hopefully a lot of love, but it’s not your work and love that get you born.

And from the baby’s point of view, being born is a totally unplanned and unexpected new beginning in an unknown new world.

So, says Jesus, God will give you spiritual birth.

And it’s great - it’s a new life given to us freely by God!

God puts in the work and the love, and there we are, newly born into the kingdom.

It’s also slightly scary because we’re pushed out into a new world we can’t choose, control or predict, outside the comfort and security of the known and familiar.

This is what Jesus was offering Nicodemus: a chance to start again with a new life in God’s kingdom.

But Nicodemus is a logical and practical man and asks:

“How can you be born again when you’re old? Surely the die is cast – I am who I am and it’s too late to change it.”

You can almost hear him thinking:

“Born again? Chance would be a fine thing!”

Like the rest of us, Nicodemus must have sometimes wished he could go back and have another go at things.

But he knows that life’s not like that.

You don’t get another go.

But Jesus says:

“It’s never too late to start again”.

Jesus offers him the chance to start a brand-new life in God’s kingdom and under his care.

This is the same offer that Jesus makes to us: come and be born again, start again, and really find God.

Not that this is a one-off, everything’s sorted now, off you go and get on with it, sort of thing.

We all have to come back to God for many new starts as we struggle and fail and get confused and doubtful.

And that’s OK because God doesn’t abandon us – however long it takes to get us going in the right direction and however many times we have to be steered back towards him.

Look again at Nicodemus: in our reading he’s a sceptical, confused man, with some understanding of who Jesus is but not yet ready to step out into the light and fully embrace life in God’s kingdom.

Yet, by the end of Jesus’ life, Nicodemus is reminding his fellow-Pharisees that they can’t condemn Jesus without a trial.

Then, after Jesus’ death, Nicodemus appears again, helping Joseph of Arimathea to bury the body.

So it seems that even Nicodemus got there in the end - and so can we.  
Thanks be to God!

### **Intercessions**

Holy Spirit of God, invisible like the wind,  
we do not see you moving among us,  
but the effect we see  
in lives made new and hearts transformed.  
Come to our hearts:

*All* **that we may be renewed and reborn.**

Holy Spirit of God,  
who brings wisdom, establishes justice,  
and reveals the secrets of all hearts,  
guide the leaders of all nations,  
bring healing and reconciliation to the United States,  
and give all peoples new hope.  
Come to our hearts:

*All* **that we may be renewed and reborn.**

Holy Sprit of God,  
whose desire it is to bind us all in love,  
look with mercy on our communities.  
May they be places of friendship and help,  
and bring your help and comfort  
to those struggling with lockdown,  
fear for the future,  
loneliness, anxiety and depression.  
Come to our hearts:

*All* **that we may be renewed and reborn.**

Holy Sprit of God,  
who brings healing in your wings,  
we cry out to you for those who are sick,  
for those who are struggling to cope with the pandemic,  
and for those tired beyond words.  
May they find new strength to sustain them in all things.  
Come to our hearts:

*All* **that we may be renewed and reborn.**

Holy Spirit of God, bringer of new life,  
we lift you those who have died,  
committing them to you confident in your goodness.  
Bring all your people to your heavenly kingdom,  
where sadness and sighing shall be no more.  
Come to our hearts:

*All* **that we may be renewed and reborn.**

Trusting in the compassion of God,  
let us pray with confidence  
as our Saviour has taught us:

*All* **Our Father, who art in heaven...**

### *Hymn: Songs of thankfulness and praise*

#### *Closing prayers*

Let us go now,  
in our heart a dream of a world without hatred  
without anguish, without violence, without greed.

Let us go on the path of the dream that the Kingdom is near  
in today's world.

A dream which God has planted in us.

A dream which we must caress and pass on.

Let us dream that dream and live that dream  
and God will be with us.

*All* **Amen.**

A blessing of the dark sky be ours,  
of the white moon and the faraway stars.  
A blessing of the cold earth be ours,  
of the hoarfrost and the drifts of snow.  
A blessing of a warm hearth be ours,  
of a lighted fire and a loving home.  
A blessing of the Trinity be ours:  
Maker, Storyteller, Holy Spirit, now and for evermore.

*All*

**Amen.**