

Iona–style Morning Prayer

Introductory prayer

The world belongs to God,
the earth and all its people.

How good it is, how wonderful,
to live together in unity.

Love and faith come together,
justice and peace join hands.

Open our lips, O God,
and our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

Confession

Holy God, maker of all,
have mercy on us.

Jesus Christ, servant of the poor,
have mercy on us.

Holy Spirit, breath of life,
have mercy on us.

At the centre of our faith is the belief that God' goodness is at the heart of humanity, planted more deeply than all that is wrong. Let us in silence confess our faults and admit our frailty. (*silence*)

For the dullness of our vision, Father forgive.

For the weakness of our faith, Jesus forgive.

For the joylessness of our living, Spirit forgive.

Holy Three have mercy upon us; forgive us our sins,
help us to seek,
help us to see,
help us to serve you.

Listen to the words of Jesus, words that we can trust: "Don't be afraid, your sins are forgiven. I love you. Come and follow me".

A Prayer for God's help

Move among us O God; give us life.
Let your people rejoice in you.

Make our hearts clean within us.
Renew us in mind and spirit.

Give us again the joy of your help.
With your spirit of freedom, sustain us.

The Collect for the day,
Heavenly Father
Your son battled with the powers of darkness
And grew closer to you in the desert;
Help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer
That we may witness to your saving love
In Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen.

The Readings for the day,

OT: Genesis 6.5-8.

NT: 1Peter 3. 18-22

The Gospel: Mark 1.9-15

At the end of the readings:
For the word of God in Scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

A Short Reflection

I wonder if you saw the programme on telly about Stonehenge last week? The archaeologists have made some interesting new discoveries. It has been known for a long time that 5000 years ago, the inner circle of 'bluestones' at this ancient monument were transported all the way from the Preseli Hills in Pembrokeshire, a distance of at least 180 miles, and lots of experiments have been done over the years to try to work out how these huge lumps of rock were moved such a long way. This latest group of archaeologists were interested in the ancient legend which was written down by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century, but which was an oral tradition long before that, of the Giant's Dance, a stone circle in the far west, being brought by the magic of Merlin to Stonehenge. It was thought that maybe the bluestones might have been part of a pre-existing stone circle, and the archaeologists set out to see if they could find it. Not only did they find the traces of where the circle had been, but also the outcrop of rock where they had originally been quarried from. So it seems that there was some small grain of truth in the old legend, a folk-memory of a far distant time. Quite why the stones were moved all that way from the Giants Dance to Stonehenge is still a complete mystery.

The story of the Great Flood, is probably a lot older than Stonehenge. Today we have heard the account from the book of Genesis, but a very similar story is told throughout the Middle East. The Epic of Gilgamesh was written in Sumerian Mesopotamia at least 4000 years ago, again from an older oral tradition, telling a very similar story, with many identical details, of a great flood which destroyed many areas of civilisation, and which a handful of people were able to survive. Perhaps there was some historical fact in this legend too—that same small grain of truth. And for hundreds of years, people have tried to work out what the historical basis was for these stories. In 1680 in Britain, when Halley's comet was first observed, Wm Whiston worked out that it must have passed very close to the earth thousands of years before, and suggested that it had doused our world with water from its tail, and exerted enough gravitational force to pull forth oceans from beneath our planet's crust, causing the great Flood. It makes you smile until you remember that it is now thought possible that all the water on earth arrived here originally delivered by asteroids or comets.

More recently, a new theory has suggested that at the end of the Ice Age, perhaps 10,000 years ago, there was a great inrush of

water from rising sea levels in the Mediterranean, which flowed 'backwards' in to the Black Sea and caused massive flooding around its perimeter. Underwater archaeology has detected an ancient shoreline under the water. It's all fascinating stuff.

But what I would like to focus on is the interpretation that our ancestors put on the story: their understanding that God in his anger had decided to wipe out his creation completely, because everything had gone to the bad, with violence and corruption. He was going to punish all life, kill everything, wipe it out—preserving just a chosen one or two. And the popularity of the legend, then and now, crossing cultures and religions, makes us ask the question—is this really the God we believe in? A God who tries making something, and when it doesn't work out well, like a spoilt child will lose his temper, and smash it all up? Or who feels that if people have done something wrong, they have to be punished, put out of the way, a clean sweep? Or is this perhaps just the way we think as humans? Are we perhaps making God in our own image?

Our second reading from the first letter of Peter in the New Testament, was written sometime in the second half of the first century AD. The writer recalls the Flood and Noah—it was very much part of his Jewish tradition—and contrasts this with his understanding of how God in Christ responds to our brokenness, our mistakes and our failings. Jesus, he says, has given us baptism, to take the place of being washed away by the Flood, not to cleanse our bodies but to start us on the way to drawing nearer to God.

It's a very different theology, isn't it? Anger, punishment, destruction on the one hand, with just a favourite few being preserved: on the other hand, a longing to help us, and a loving self-sacrifice for all who want to receive it.

Which sort of God do we believe in?

Our gospel story for the beginning of Lent tells us of Jesus going into the wilderness after his baptism, to meditate and to draw nearer to God. And this is our time to do the same: time to brush up our consciences, cleanse our spirits, do our own thinking, reflection, and contemplation. To think about what sort of God it is that we believe in.

Amen.

Our Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.

We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Let us pray:

You may like to:

give thanks for something good that has happened for you.

pray for someone or some part of the world you know which is in
trouble of some sort

pray for your friends and family

remember someone who has died.

The Lord's prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name; your kingdom come;
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Closing prayer

O God, you have set before us a great hope
that your kingdom will come on earth, and have taught us to pray
for its coming. Make us ready to thank you for the signs of its
dawning, and to pray and work for the perfect day when your will
shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.
In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

May the blessing of the God of life be ours,
the blessing of the loving Christ be ours,
the blessing of the Holy Spirit be ours,
to cherish us, to help us, to make us holy.

Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God!