

3rd January 2021

Hearsall at Home

Hello and welcome to the Hearsall at Home podcast.

My name is David Sutcliffe and I am the minister at Hearsall Baptist Church,
Coventry in the UK.

We hope that you will listen to our service podcasts either on a Sunday morning, or
at another time and you will join us as we worship, sing, pray and reflect on the
scriptures.

People around the world, around the UK and in our own City are joining us and I
want to give a special welcome to people who are listening for the first time, you are
very welcome today.

Visit our church website where you can find a written copy of each podcast, and
Bible study notes on the theme of my weekly talk.

Occasionally we will be welcoming guest speakers to give their perspective on the
scriptures for that week and we hope that you will find every episode a blessing.

Remember to subscribe if you would like to be notified of each new episode.

If you are listening this morning, our time of Sunday morning fellowship is on Zoom
from 11:30am.

Please go to our home page for meeting link:

Hearsallbaptist.org

Order of Service, 3rd January 2021

The Two Kings

Call to worship

Epiphany comes on Wednesday, but I thought we'd ponder today the story of the Magi and the Two Kings. The appearance of the strange visitors from the East was foreshadowed in these words from Isaiah chapter 60.

Isaiah 60: 1 - 6

'Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

2 See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.

3 Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

4 'Lift up your eyes and look about you:
all assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the hip.

5 Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will come.

6 Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.
And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

Let's sing together *As with Gladness Men of Old...*

Hymn **As with Gladness**

1. As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright,
So, most gracious God, may we
Evermore be led to thee.

2. As with joyful steps they sped
To that lowly manger-bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him whom heaven and earth adore,
So may we, with willing feet,
Ever seek thy mercy-seat.

3. As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare,
So may we with holy joy,
Pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.

4. Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright
Need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,
Thou its sun, which goes not down.
There for ever may we sing
Alleluias to our King.

Prayer (Jan Berry)

God of gold, we seek your glory: the richness that transforms drabness into colour,
and brightens our dullness with vibrant light;
your wonder and joy at the heart of all life.

God of incense, we offer you our prayer: our spoken and unspeakable longings, our
questioning of truth, our search for your mystery deep within.

God of myrrh, we cry out to you in our suffering:
the pain of all our rejections and bereavements,
our baffled despair at undeserved suffering,
our rage at continuing injustice;
and we embrace you, God-with-us,
in our wealth, in our yearning, in our anger and loss.

The Lord's prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is 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 forever. Amen.

Jesus' birth was prophesied. The Magi had heard that prophecy and recognised who
Jesus is: the Light of the World. We sing...

Song **Light of the world**

Verse 1

Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You,
Hope of a life spent with You.

Chorus

*So here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.*

Verse 2

King of all days, oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above.
Humbly You came to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

Chorus

Bridge

And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross,
And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.

Ending

So here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You are my God.

It's a pleasure to introduce our dear sister Chris Hamer as she shares her thoughts in Doors Ajar.

Doors Ajar

When David approached me to ask if I'd like to offer my experiences to Doors Ajar, my immediate reaction was that I wasn't sure I'd be able to contribute enough, but as soon as we started to talk about our Christmases it became obvious that, as always, I could chat for England!

So, welcome to this year's Christmas, Hamer style. It became blatantly apparent that Christmas 2020 was going to be a very different occasion for everyone, particularly with the ever-changing government regulations. Pete and I had decided very early on that this would be our first Christmas, after 53 years of marriage, that would be spent at home on our own. This decision was taken to alleviate any worries about bubbles or households meeting together and unknowingly passing on the virus.

Our sons were concerned that we would be on our own, but we managed to reassure them, we would be fine. So, how was it? Well, after early morning phone calls to family and friends we had breakfast and then we waited for the pre-arranged visit of Richard, our younger son, with his wife, Danae, and son, Kian, to exchange gifts and to enjoy a coffee together in our amazingly sunny garden. We were surprised with the heat that was coming from the sun, and also the beautiful blue sky.

Richard, who's a firefighter, had spent all night rescuing people from their flooded homes at Billing Aquadrome. They were only with us for about half an hour, and then went home so that Richard could get some much-needed sleep.

When they left we drove round to Allesley village to spend a similar time with our elder son Kevin, his wife Jill and our grandson Murray. Unfortunately, their garden didn't offer the sunshine that ours had, so we were treated to a glass of mulled wine with mince pies to warm us up before we returned home.

Having prepared the vegetables on Christmas Eve, and I'd put the turkey in the oven before going to Kev's, there was very little to do and I successfully managed to get everything timed so that we could listen to the Queen at 3 o'clock.

Lunch was delicious, even if I say so myself, and so easy to have only Pete and me to please. We've been used to having big family celebrations, which are wonderful, but seem to be getting harder as we get older, so it was lovely to just have each other to look after. The rest of the day was spent nibbling on delicious goodies and relaxing in front of the TV.

So all in all, our day was a huge success. It isn't something we'd look forward to annually, and trust that 2021 will be more of our traditional Christmas. I hope that

you all had a peaceful time and that the New Year will be one where things can regain a little bit of normality, and we can all meet up and share in great big hugs, the thing that a lot of us are missing more than anything else.

Finally, God bless you all, and I will see you either on Zoom or somewhere around in the very near future, I hope. Chris.

Many thanks Chris; it was lovely to hear from you today.

Peace is something we share with one another. Let's do that in our hearts as we sing, *Peace, I give to you.*

Song Peace I Give to You (as a round)

Verse 1

Peace I give to you, I give to you my peace. x 2

Chorus

Let it flow to one another, Let it flow, let it flow. x 2

Verse 2

Love I give to you, I give to you my love. x 2

Chorus

Verse 3

Hope I give to you, I give to you my hope. x 2

Chorus

Verse 4

Joy I give to you, I give to you my joy. x 2

Chorus

Verse 5

Grace I give to you, I give to you my grace. x 2

Chorus

Verse 6

Power I give to you, I give to you my power. x 2

Chorus

Our prayers of intercession this week have been written by Derek Noel and are being read by Peter Fearn.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, you are the ruler of time; you have held us in the past and will guide us in the future, so we bring to you our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows.

At the beginning of this year, we ask for your guidance.

We pray that you will lead us as a Church into Your future.

May any plans we make be part of Christ's work and mission both here and in the larger world.

We pray for the nation of which we are a part; for all whose future is affected by leaving The European Community.

We pray for all whose decisions will bring long term effects on the lives of many people.

Lord, we pray for a future where people everywhere seek to live in peace. We pray for places throughout the world where there is constant conflict and where there is distrust and hatred.

We bring to you all those who are ill and those who are concerned about them. We pray for those working to save lives and cure sickness. We bring to you overworked medical staff and their families.

We ask, Lord, that you be with those who mourn the death of one they have loved. Be with all those who try their best to bring healing and comfort.

As the schools reopen at this difficult time, we pray for staff and pupils. Give wisdom to all who have had hard decisions to make; may there be good cooperation so that everyone will feel the benefit.

And now a time of quiet as we bring individuals known to us who need our special prayers at this time.

Lord, ever loving, ever giving God, we bring these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. AMEN

Thanks Derek and thanks Peter.

Let's hear now our Bible readings from Matthew and also Ephesians. Our readers are Annie and Nick Leonard.

Bible Readings:

Matthew 2: 1 - 12

The Magi visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Ephesians 1: 3 - 14

Praise for spiritual blessings in Christ

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to son-ship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

Christ came as a different sort of a king, to bring peace into our world and he calls us to live as channels of that peace. We sing together, *Make me a channel of your peace.*

Hymn Make me a Channel of your Peace

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring your love,

Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,

And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Oh Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood, as to understand,
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope,
Where there is darkness, only light,
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

Chorus

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving to all men that we receive
And in dying that we gain eternal life.

Sermon

The Two Kings

Well a few months ago I took a walk in Derbyshire and came down from a hill, through some woodland, to the river Ashop. There my attention was absorbed for a time by the way the water broke on some stones and continuously formed the same pattern in the early autumn air. As the water splashed onto the rocks it formed the shape of a horse, or so it seemed to me.

I suppose some creatures live their entire lives within a stone's throw of this section of the Ashop river. A water vole, an insect. For some creatures, the way the river plays on this particular set of rocks is the backdrop to their entire universe.

Well, I continued my walk to see the river broaden out and then merge into the expanse of Ladybower reservoir. Through aquifers and pipes this reservoir provides water for the homes of many northern industrial cities.

But for each water drop, this is actually only a fragment of their story. The H₂O has existed for millennia, and each particular watery molecule might have been through the body of a crocodile on the Zambezi river or a slum dweller in Sao Paolo; each drop might have been frozen solid in the last ice age for centuries, perhaps it was part of the glaciers that carved out the Cumbrian lakes or once perhaps it whirled at the eye of a tornado in the South China Sea... It may have existed for millennia as a fragment of the world's oceans before evaporating into the sky and falling as gentle rain on an unnamed Pacific island.

And the elements of hydrogen and oxygen were themselves discarded from some star several billion years previously. So no, Miss Water Vole, the way the river plays on the stone in front of your little hole, this is not all there is to it.

Some creatures have glimpses of the wider world. As I walked, swallows were beginning to migrate from the UK, flying over France and Spain and the Mediterranean Sea, feeding on the wing from insects, flying across the Sahara desert and the Congo rainforest – finally reaching South Africa and Namibia. If a swallow had happened to perch on a tree by the river Ashop, presumably it would have been under no illusions that this little river and play of water was the whole shebang.

The villages of Ashop and Derwent were deliberately flooded last century, their inhabitants relocated, and King George VI opened the reservoir on 24th September 1945. Villagers come and go and live and die. Even monarchs come and go and live and die. Whatever was in King George's mind on 24th September 1945 we perhaps do not know. We can be so taken up in our own little slice of the universe - what's in our head can seem so important - that we can forget how most of the things that agitate us are small beer in the grand scheme of things.

We know that some people in English history rarely or even never travelled beyond their own parish boundaries. But we know, too, that many in the ancient world did travel and saw something of the wider world.

King Herod the Great had travelled. He'd been to Rome to establish his status as a client king of the Roman Empire. Herod was a powerful and successful man. He built the Temple in Jerusalem that Jesus knew; its retaining walls still stand today. He was shrewd and worldly and ruthless. Perhaps today we would call him a sociopath. He had family members killed in order to cling onto power. He arranged that, upon his own death, a large group of worthy men would also be killed because he wanted to ensure there would be general sadness and mourning. I'm glad to say that request was ignored.

The Magi were migrants too, I suppose, travelling maybe from Babylon, where a large Jewish colony existed. Perhaps these Magi had learnt of the expectation of a great shepherd king, a messiah yet to come, from their Jewish neighbours. They were probably astrologers. Maybe they saw the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 7/6 BCE as a portent of a coming king, and discerned that the thing their Jewish friends had been waiting for was about to occur.

There's no doubt that Matthew tells us this story to focus our attention on two contrasting kings. One, Herod, though well-travelled and successful, is as blind as a bat when it comes to seeing beyond his own self-interest. Another, the infant Jesus, is a king in a unique sense. He is not going to sit in a palace and order grand civil engineering projects to shore up his own ego. Nor will he have his opponents put to the sword, challenged in court or poisoned with a nerve agent. He is the King of kings, meaning that earthly monarchs may retain their kingdom but are called to rule benevolently under his authority.

Matthew's tale of Magi travelling from afar to worship the new-born King sends some important messages to his readers. Jesus was a king not just for Jews, but also for Gentiles. And this king was divine - for look, the Magi worshipped him.

The Roman Empire was an overarching structure of local client rulers and officials of various statuses stretching from Spain in the West to Asia Minor in the East. It endured for centuries. The Kingdom of Jesus will wrap around the entire globe and exist as long as history itself.

And wise women and wise men sense this. Like the swallow they have seen something beyond their immediate world. In one respect, Herod is like the swallow - he has travelled and seen and done great things. In another, he is like my imagined water vole by the river Ashop, totally taken up with the immediate concerns of his own self-interest.

So, where does this leave us as we begin 2021? We are not foolish enough to think that merely changing the number of the year brings us real hope. The reading we heard from Ephesians lists the tremendous personal benefits of being a believer, but then casually slips in a statement of dramatic and cosmic significance.

*With all wisdom and understanding, [God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – **to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.***

My water vole watching the play of the River Ashop on some stones has no conception of the destiny of the water she watches, the size of the planet she lives on, the extent of the universe she inhabits. And we have little conception of **how** the King of kings will gather **all things** into unity under his authority.

But this **is** the big vision. The Magi sensed it. They acknowledged the authority of a king greater than themselves or their own rulers and greater than Herod or Emperor Augustus.

Though we have little conception of **how** God gathers everything together under Christ, that does not excuse us from thinking about it. Maybe the universe has countless civilizations like ours and God cares for each one. Maybe God gathers the water vole and the swallow, King George VI and the Emperor Augustus, and everything that is, into some parallel universe called heaven. Maybe the process of evolution is guided by God to produce a species - humans - who can make a conscious choice whether to co-operate with the God of love or not, and in reality, love could never be love without the freedom we humans experience not to love. I speculate.

But here's the thing in closing. We've seen the end of the story. We've seen the big picture. As swallows have seen migrant boats on the Mediterranean Sea and camel trains in the Sahara desert, we have seen the overarching plan of God, to bring everything and everyone into the unitive and loving authority of Christ: all people included, regardless of religion, nationality, race, sexuality or any other characteristic.

How does this help us now? Two points.

One, don't over-interpret each small rise and fall in our fortunes. Most of the twists and turns in our fight against a pandemic may be forgotten. Some will be false leads. Some will be game-changers. Yes, we are rescued by the approval of new vaccines; that's good. But many will yet suffer and die and some listening to this may experience severe setbacks in the coming year.

I take an interest in the results of Leeds United football club, who entered the premiership this season, and on Tuesday night my son-in-law and I settled to watch Leeds play away to struggling West Bromwich Albion. It was a delight for a Leeds fan. Our team ran away with the game winning 5-0 and scored four majestic goals that were poetry expressed in football, goals of great skill and beauty.

Now, I could leave this match thinking how Leeds are now the best team in the country. But I remember just two games ago, Leeds were panned 6-2 by Manchester United. As a world-weary supporter, I know each game is just that one game, and that I shouldn't over-interpret a single result.

And we as a nation, and each of us as individuals - should not over-interpret any given moment. There will be good moments and bad moments, rises and falls, successes and failures. Earthly kingdoms come and go, but the kingdom of love endures forever. Freddie Mercury overstated it when he sang, *Nothing really matters*, but he was in the right direction. Much of what we fret about day to day is of little enduring consequence. It's just like an eddy in the river being stared at by my water vole.

We need to learn, in the words of another song, to let it go! Or at least, don't over-interpret every single rise or fall in our personal or national circumstances.

And my **second point**. Well, although much of what we experience doesn't matter all that much, even so, **God hides behind every single experience we have**. He is always there. His Kingdom could be compared to a magnetic field.

Did you do that thing at school with iron filings on a sheet of paper held over a bar magnet? You shake the paper a little, and the iron filings align with the invisible magnetic field.

God's Kingdom is like a magnetic field of love. Whatever is going on, wherever we are in space or time, his Kingdom is among us. If we just take a moment to align ourselves, we can feel that. Perhaps life's little knocks could be likened to the tapping on that piece of paper - to disturb the iron filings enough so that they align.

Our spiritual habits are to train us to experience this and to live by it. Our prayers for others are expressions of our love and God's love for them, a love we know can reach them even if we can't. Our songs of worship are a realignment of our lives with the magnetic field of the Kingdom of love. Our Bible readings and spoken prayers of devotion are a conscious way of lining up our lives with that magnetic loving field of God's Kingdom.

And this is why, for those who are ready, meditation and silent prayer are so important. Our minds are so easily entranced by the momentary rise and fall of circumstance. In meditation we distance our sense of identity and wellbeing from these moments of rising and falling. But then, having distanced ourselves, we can then inhabit each moment with our souls fully aligned with the compelling vision of the inexorable reign of the Kingdom of love.

Meditation

In closing I want to offer a meditation...

Sit still. Be comfortable, but not slouched.

Take a moment to tense and relax the muscles of your body from the top of your head to your feet.

Now imagine yourself sitting by a river.

As you look at the flow of the water, settle into a regular pattern of breathing.

With each normal breath, mentally say, *God is Love*.

Watch the river flowing by.

With each breath, continue to say, *God is Love*.

When other thoughts come into your mind as they will, see them as like a boat on the river. Don't fight them, but watch the boat come and go. Try not to jump on! Just let the boat and the thought make their way down the river. Use the rhythm of your breath to draw your attention back: God is love.

Silence on a podcast is not a good idea. As you listen to a short piece of music now, continue to meditate.

Music for continued meditation.

In a world of darkness, trouble, hunger and thirst, we are called to let Christ's light shine through us. Our closing song is, *Longing for Light*, we wait in darkness. The twists and turns of our everyday life may leave us feeling left in the darkness. Let's lift our eyes to the light of Christ our King.

Song Longing for light we Wait in Darkness (Christ be our Light)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Chorus

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Chorus

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Chorus

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Chorus

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Chorus

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today. X 2*

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
And the love of God;
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, evermore.
Amen

Sung Blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you
Wherever he may send you;
May he guide you through the wilderness;
Protect you through the storm;
May he bring you home rejoicing
At the wonders he has shown you;
May he bring you home rejoicing
Once again into our doors.