



CNC Worship Sheet – 14th December 2025

This week, we will be thinking about testimony – of both telling and hearing our stories and how we have encountered God in our lives. Thinking about how this helps us to develop our faith and service to God and each other.

Call to worship

We tell our stories – our experiences of Christ;
speaking our testimonies, sharing how we have encountered the divine
in church,
in the streets,
in our homes,
in those we meet.

We prepare to meet the infant Christ by witnessing God's love,
we live out the Gospel through our lives and actions,
we testify to the love of God in our deeds.

Hymn 188 There's a light upon the mountain

1 There's a light upon the mountains,
And the day is at the spring,
When our eyes shall see the beauty
And the glory of the King:
Weary was our heart with waiting,
And the night-watch seemed so long,
But His triumph day is breaking,
And we hail it with a song.

2 There's a hush of expectation
And a quiet in the air,
And the breath of God is moving
In the fervent breath of prayer;
For the suffering, dying Jesus
Is the Christ upon the throne,
And the travail of our spirit
Is the travail of His own.

3 He is breaking down the barriers,
He is casting up the way;
He is calling for His angels
To build up the gates of day:
But His angels here are human,
Not the shining hosts above;
For the drum beats of His army
Are the heartbeats of our love.

4 Hark! we hear a distant music,
And it comes with fuller swell;
'Tis the triumph-song of Jesus,
Of our King, Immanuel!
Go ye forth with joy to meet Him!
And, my soul, be swift to bring
All thy sweetest and thy dearest
For the triumph of our King

H. Burton (1840-1930)

Opening Prayer

*This can be done with another person saying the parts in **bold** type.*

We are blessed, for God has done great things for us;

our souls glorify God, our Saviour!

We are blessed, so we declare this blessing to the world:

our souls glorify God, our Saviour!

God brings down the arrogant and powerful of the world;

our souls glorify God, our Saviour!

God brings down the rich and sends them away empty;

our souls glorify God, our Saviour!

The oppressed are lifted up high and filled with good things;

our souls glorify God, our Saviour!

The oppressed are beloved of God and God has compassion for them,

our souls glorify God, our Saviour!

We are blessed, God brought down the rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

Our souls glorify God, our Saviour! Amen.

Reading Matthew 11: 2-11

2 ¹ When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' ⁴Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Hymn 182 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh.

Awake and harken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings!

2 Then cleansed be every life from sin:
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

3 We hail you as our Savior, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward.

Without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
and make us rise to fall no more.
O let your face upon us shine
and fill the world with love divine.

5 All praise to you, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

J. Chandler (1806-1976)

Reflection

Testimony is one of those things that we consider to be highly important to our faith, but in practice, we don't always do it. I often find listening to someone's testimony and how they have encountered God to be more impactful than a sermon. We hear stories about people's lives that we may not have heard before and we see how God has played a role in their life. It can make our faith more alive, more relevant, and we see how others have 'done it' before, showing a way forward. The Gospel stories are also testimony, in a sense. Of people making sense of who this person, Jesus, was (and is!), how to understand it and communicate it to others, and how to make sense of him being the Christ and our Saviour. In our reading, we have Jesus speaking of John the Baptist, who gave his testimony about God and what was going to happen. Jesus also tells the disciples of John the Baptist to go to him and give their testimony about Jesus. So, in this, I thought I would share some of my testimony.

Some will know from my testimony service before my ordination last year that I haven't had an easy life: experiencing a traumatic and adverse childhood, which followed me into adulthood with bad mental health, homelessness and joblessness, and more. Aspects of my life have continued to be hard, with the indelible effects from my childhood creating difficulty, along with some very challenging experiences arising throughout the past few years. Furthermore, I have spent much of this year unwell, with symptoms starting in April and my condition worsening at the end of August and requiring time off. I am still not 100% and I am still waiting for hospital appointments and answers.

My question is this: Where is God in all of this struggle? With my body feeling like it is letting me down, with many people in my life letting me down, and more. The Church, too, has let me down at various times. I know some people experience God's presence all the more in these times, but I do not. I experience God best when there is life and energy, creativity and goodness, community and joy. So when things are hard, I do not feel God, and it can be challenging to hold onto the fact that God is there. Yet, I still know that, despite the flaws of people and our institutions, despite the imperfect life I have led and experienced, and despite not seeing God, God is with me.

One of the names or titles we give Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God with us. I often go back to this name because it is central to my understanding of God. God is with us, Jesus Christ is with us. Throughout my whole life, Jesus Christ has been with me, suffering with me, celebrating with me, and everything in between! I may not feel God's presence all the time, especially when things are

hard. Sometimes I even doubt. For me, doubt has rarely been about whether God is or is not, but more about what God desires for me and others. Also, I do not see doubt as the enemy of faith because we can allow it to help us think and consider, if we engage with it rather than allow it to swallow us up. However, this does not prevent God from being with me.

I experience God best in connecting with others, of sharing with them; recently this has been in the support I have received from others. Seb has been a tremendous support for me, I have been uplifted by people's prayers for me, the cards and messages sent to me, the welcome I received from them when I returned to work. These are tangible signs of God's presence, signs of the love of the Spirit flowing through and in people. This is one of the best ways for me to experience God – being in community. In the New Testament and in theology, there is a word for this: *koinonia*. It means community, sharing life with each other, participating with each other. This is the work of the Spirit of Christ in us, when we share and generate goodness through this sharing. Typically by reconnecting with others and reconnecting with myself through things that bring me joy, such as painting, sharing a good meal, etc. One thing that often prevents me from returning to God, or, rather, reconnecting with God, is by making myself feel bad for being disconnected. Shame and guilt do not assist me here! Furthermore, a part of this sharing, participating and reconnecting needs us to bring ourselves, including our stories, 'warts and all'.

This means not only being 'fine' and 'okay' when we are in church, but also allowing ourselves and others to bring the other parts of our lives. The parts that are misshapen, sharp, weak, sore, and vulnerable. If we are to speak of how God works in our lives with integrity, we must be sincere and compassionate in doing so. Through this, we show the fuller picture of how God has worked with us and in us, and we show others that they are not alone in their pain, doubt, struggle, and difficulty. I am not always great at doing this – I often prefer to smile and laugh. This is a mix of being actually happy when I do so, as well as a way to keep going. To be vulnerable is scary a lot of the time!

God is with us, even if we do not feel it or know it. I have shared a bit of my struggle with this, as well as some of the ways I experience God well. Through sharing and participating in each other's lives, that *koinonia* stuff, we experience a tangible workings of God's Spirit in our lives. I pray that through sharing my testimony, you are able to go and do likewise; that is, to explore where God has been and is at work in your life. I also hope that by sharing some of the more vulnerable parts of me, I have shown that things don't have to be 'perfect' or 'right' to be able to follow Christ – you are already completely loved by God and nothing we can do will affect this. In this love, God is with you, with each of us. Our Immanuel.

Hymn 180 O come, O come Immanuel

1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

2 O come, O come, Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.

Refrain

3 O come, O Rod of Jesse free
your own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

4 O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.

Refrain

5 O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace.

Refrain

*Latin, 18th century, based on the ancient Advent Antiphons.
Translated by J. M. Neale (1811-1866)*

Intercessions

God with us, we offer our prayers for ourselves and for others,
for those we know and those we don't know,
for those we love and those we don't love.

We pray for the wars, conflicts and genocides in the world:
for those who have no safety or sustenance,
for those who have been harmed through violence and displacement,
for those who cause the aggression and harm;
guide us all in your ways of love and peace.

We pray for the places where there is poverty and oppression:
for those who have no home or shelter,
for those who have no food or water,
for those whose greed causes poverty and oppression;
help us all to know that your grace is sufficient.

We pray for those who are unwell or struggling:
for those who are in hospital or hospices,
for those who are waiting for or receiving treatment,
for strength to be given to carers and those unwell;
heal us all to a fulness of life.

We pray for the leaders in the world:
for them to lead with compassion,
for them to be servants to others,
for decisions to be made for the benefit of all;
inspire us all with your wisdom.

We pray for creation:
for a ravaged world to be restored,
for animals to be able to flourish once more,
for humanity to be good stewards;
enliven us all for a better world.

We pray for ourselves and those we know:
for support where it is needed,
for times of joy when it is right,
for times of sorrow when it is right;
embolden us all with your goodness.

We offer these prayers in the name of the One whom we call our Saviour. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn 172 Hills of the north rejoice

1 Hills of the North, rejoice,
river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
he brings salvation from above.

2 Isles of the Southern seas,
sing to the listening earth,
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth:
In Christ shall all be made anew,
his word is sure, his promise true.

3 Lands of the East, arise,
he is your brightest morn,
greet him with joyous eyes,

praise shall his path adorn:
your seers have longed to know their Lord;
to you he comes, the final word.

4 Shores of the utmost West,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come:
he brings a never-ending light
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

5 Shout, as you journey home,
songs be in every mouth,
lo, from the North they come,
from East and West and South:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.

C. E. Oakley (1832-1865)

Blessing

We witness God's love in our lives,
we testify to God's love in our lives, and
we persevere in God's love in our lives.

The blessing of God
the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit
is with us, always. Amen.