

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 31st, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Praise the Lord
First Sunday After Christmas
Psalm 148

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.

**Just and true are your ways,
King of the nations.**

Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?

**For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship before you.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Almighty and ever present God,
you uphold heaven and earth and all creatures.
All things come from your generous hand:
You send the nourishing rain, the refreshing wind,
the warming sun, the blustering snow.

You make buds appear, flowers bloom,
fruit grow, and harvests mature.

Through each day of our lives,
whether in sickness or health,
prosperity or poverty, joy or sorrow,
you are in control.

Help us to be patient when things go against us,
thankful when things go well,
and always confident that nothing
could ever separate us from your love.

For your unending faithfulness, we thank and praise you.
To you be glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn #141: “Good Christians, All Rejoice”

Good Christians, all rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;

Now give heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ is born today,
ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today;
Christ is born today.

Now you hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this.
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this;
Christ was born for this.

Now you need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save,
calls you one and calls you all
to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save;
Christ was born to save.

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

As we draw to the close of this year
and claim the year ahead, our Father,
we need to confess to you those pieces of the past
that persist in pulling us backward.
Through admitting our failures and sharing our sin,
we would like to put away those things
that nibble and nag, de-energize and depress.
With boldness, then, and a certain measure of embarrassment,
we admit to squandering time and talent,
good intentions and better ideas,
opportunities for growth and occasions for grace.

We admit that we have most often taken care of ourselves
 while others have stood in line.
 We have defined our interests carefully and our goals precisely,
 using energy and expertise gainfully
 to the detriment of family, friends, community, and church.
 We agonize with memories that sit heavily
 and images that cause us to blush
 and ask that you would grant us your forgiveness
 as we confess our individual regrets and remorse in silence. . . .
 Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting. Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us. We are forgiven and set free to begin again. Let us forgive one another just as God has forgiven us. May the peace of Christ be with us all.

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

Music Ministry: "Amen! Go Tell it on the Mountain!" Choir

Responsive Reading

Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
 my soul shall exult in my God,
 for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
 he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
 as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
 and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ **For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
 and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
 so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
 to sprout up before all the nations.**

Zion's Coming Salvation

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.

**²The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.**

**³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.**

Children's Hymn #166: "Once in Royal David's City"

Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

Christ came down to earth from heaven,
who is God and Lord of all,
sheltered by a humble stable,
cradled in a cattle stall:
with the poor, oppressed and lowly,
lived on earth our Saviour holy,

and our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love,
for that child so dear and gentle
is our Lord in heaven above,
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.

Children's Lesson

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

ScripturePsalm 148

Praise the Name of the LORD

148 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts!

³ Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD!

For he commanded and they were created.

⁶ And he established them forever and ever;
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all deeps,

⁸ fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!

⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰ Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!

¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

¹² Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;

his majesty is above earth and heaven.

¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the LORD!

Sermon

Praise the Lord.

It is not often that we have a Sunday fall upon New Year's Eve, and it presents us with a wonderful opportunity to get us focused on the correct things for the coming year. New Year's Eve is a time of promises and resolutions, a time when we set goals to become the person that we want to be in the coming year, or at least a little bit closer to that person we want to be.

The truth is that, it is very easy for our hearts to be led astray by the things of this world. The trials and temptations that we face every day of the year can sometimes draw us further and further from the person that God wants us to be.

So, let's take advantage of today being New Year's Eve, and make a resolution today to get our hearts back in line with God. We can do this by listening to His Word and making changes in our lives to bring our focus back upon our Lord and Saviour as we worship and praise him in the coming year.

Psalms 148 is a wonderful example of praising and worshiping God. The goal of all of creation is to join in the worship on the one true living God, and everything in the world is moving towards the day when this will happen. On the day of Judgement, Paul tells us that, 'every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.'

In the psalm we see this happening. It begins with the call for the heavens to worship, then the call for the earth to worship and finally for the call for all things, especially the people of God to praise and worship the one true living God.

Charles Spurgeon summed up this psalm by saying, 'as a flash of lightning flames through space, and enwraps both heaven and earth in one vestment of glory, so doth the adoration of the Lord in this Psalm light up all the universe and cause it to glow with a radiance of praise.'

Mankind was created to worship, we know that in this world people all worship something, some people choose to worship themselves, some people choose to worship their sin of choice, some people choose to worship sports, or a movie star or musician.

However, mankind was created to worship God, that is what Jesus meant when he told us the most important commandment is to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.'

Yet here in the very first verse of psalm 148 we learn that it is not just mankind that is called to worship God first, it is also the purpose of all of the created things that are above the earth.

Praise the Lord is the message of psalm 148. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights. This is a call for everything that is above the earth to gather together in praise and worship of God.

The psalmist even goes into detail about how that praise is meant to happen. The angels and the hosts of heaven are to lift up their voices in praise. And all throughout the scriptures we see examples of the heavenly host doing just this.

In Isaiah 6:2-4

Isaiah 6:2-3

² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

**“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”**

In Luke:

Luke 2:13-14

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ **“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”**

And in the book of Revelation

Revelation 7:11-12

¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

It is not just the heavenly host and the angels who are praising and worshiping God.

The Psalmist goes on to say that the sun, the moon, and the stars praise and worship God.

How do the sun, moon and stars praise God?

In psalm 19, David tells us that even though these celestial bodies have no voice they do indeed praise God.

Psalm 19:1-6

- ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**
- ² Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.**
- ³ There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.**
- ⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,**
- ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.**
- ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.**

No matter where you go in the world, whether it is day or night you can look up into the sky and marvel at the wonders of God's creation. The beauty of the landscape at sunrise and sunset. The way the stars twinkle, especially on a cold and clear night. If you have ever witnessed the northern lights, all of these things in the heavens have brought mankind to the idea that there must have been a creator since the earliest times.

God has always made his presence known to the people of earth through his creation.

In Romans we are told:

Romans 1:18-20

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse.

God speaks to people who have no knowledge of who God is by simply showing them the wonders of his creation.

Whenever someone looks up into the night sky, whenever someone looks upon a beautiful sunrise or sunset, whenever someone feels an overwhelming sense of their own insignificance in this world. Every time they realize that even the best scientists in this world cannot explain creation without making assumptions about what happened and leaps of faith in the possibility

and probability of those things happening. They cannot explain the creation of the universe or the evolution of mankind without absolute certainty, which is why they will always refer to it as a theory rather than a fact. When they begin to dig deeper into the theory, they often find things which although possible, are not probable, and leaps of faith and assumptions that were made by earlier scientists that have never been verified. Finally, many come to the conclusion that there has to be a creator, someone who made all of this according to a plan.

The sun, the moon and the stars give praise to their creator, it is all part of God's plan here on Earth. All of the heavens and heavenly hosts praise God.

Psalm 148:5-6

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD!

For he commanded and they were created.

**⁶ And he established them forever and ever;
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.**

They all praise God because he is their creator, that is all of the reason that they need.

Psalm 148:7-14

**⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all deeps,
⁸ fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!**

**⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
¹⁰ Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!**

**¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
¹² Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!**

**¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.
¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the LORD!**

All of the natural world praises God as well. Giant sea creatures, like the whales, who we have discovered sing incredible songs as they swim through the oceans. There have been recordings made of whales singing solos and duets, singing in trios and quartets, and even singing in huge choruses interweaving their voices together, sometimes for just a few minutes and other times for up to thirty minutes.

Just imagine what it would be like to hear the voices of these giant 40-ton beasts singing together in praise and worship of their creator.

Or a pack of wolves who join together in that haunting howling chorus they do on a dark night. Or the chorus of birds as they sing and flit about the trees, the sounds of frogs at dusk and dawn, the crickets at night. All of creation sings, and when we pay attention to it, we honestly listen to it and consider the beauty and complexity of it, we cannot help but know that there is a creator.

Even the fire, the hail, the snow, and the mist all praise and worship God their creator.

Every sunbeam that shines down from the sun, every raindrop, every snowflake was created by God and serves his purpose. One of the marvels of the modern scientific world is that every snowflake is unique. They try to use science to explain it, however they cannot really give a clear answer as to why every snowflake is unique, every single one of them, even when billions and billions of them fall together in a winter storm.

The mountains, the hills and the lands all offer up their praise and worship to God. Living here we have to admit that we see the Glory of God every fall when the leaves begin to change color and the sun's golden rays shine across the landscape. The whole world praises God when the flowers bloom in the spring or when the leaves change in the fall.

Then in the final verses of psalm 148 the author turns his attention to God's people.

'Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! ¹²Young men and maidens together, old men and children!' Every human being on earth is called to praise and worship the Lord. Psalm 8 says that praise comes out of the mouths of babies and infants. All people, men, and women, young and old, rich, and poor, powerful, and weak are called to praise the Lord. People of all nations, all tribes, all peoples, and all languages are going to recognize God as the creator.

There are no exceptions, no one left out because of their worldly values or beliefs. No one is excused from worshiping God because they worship something else.

Throughout mankind's history we have seen people worship the stars, the planets, the seasons, angels, and demons. We have seen people worship animals, mountains, trees, and even stormy weather.

However, in this psalm the author has just told us that every one of these things that people on this planet choose to place above God are in fact worshipping God.

All of this world exists for the one purpose of praising and worshipping God. Knowing this should help us recognize that is our purpose in life. Praising and worshipping the God that created us, the one who knew us before we were even in our mother's womb.

Finally, the psalmist tells us why it is we are to praise God and not his creation.

God has raised up for his people a horn. A horn appears in Scripture in many places, and it always represents strength, like a ram's horn is strong and used to attack and protect. So, the psalmist is telling us that we are to praise the Lord because of the strength he gives us.

Some commentators believe that this is a reference to Jesus Christ's coming, the horn of our salvation as it calls him in Luke 1:69

Luke 1:68-69

⁶⁸ **"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,**

Praise the Lord, Praise Jesus Christ, place God first in your life.

The rest of the world that does not place God first, the ones who have their false idols will discover the truth on the day of Judgement. On that day they will know that they were called to worship and praise God first in this life.

They have witnessed the praise and worship that the heavens, the angels, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, hills and valleys, the trees, the flowers and the fields, the animals on the earth, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea all raise their voices in praise to their creator, and they have ignored that so that they could live a life of self-seeking pleasure.

The psalmist makes it simple, 'Praise the Lord', praise the creator. Or as Jesus taught us, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.'

So, as we begin this new year, let us do just that. Praise God.

Let us pray,

Enlighten Our Darkened Hearts

Lord God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously opened the eyes of the blind

through your Son Christ Jesus,
 and have let us poor sinners see your light.
 Enlighten our darkened hearts
 so that we may rightly learn and know Christ your Son,
 who died on the cross for us,
 and was counted guilty of our sins.
 May we see your gracious help and mercy
 in all our needs and afflictions,
 and may we seek that help
 through faithful prayer
 and find our comfort and defense against the devil,
 and finally be delivered in death. **Amen.**

Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Quinquagesima

Hymn #161: "What Child is This"

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
 on Mary's lap is sleeping?
 Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
 while shepherds watch are keeping?
 This, this is Christ the King,
 whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
 haste, haste to bring him laud,
 the babe, the son of Mary.

Why lies he in such mean estate
 where ox and ass are feeding?
 Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
 the silent Word is pleading.
 Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
 the cross be borne for me, for you.
 Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
 the babe, the son of Mary.

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
 come, peasant, king, to own him.
 The King of kings salvation brings;
 let loving hearts enthrone him.
 Raise, raise the song on high;
 the virgin sings her lullaby.
 Joy, joy for Christ is born,
 the babe, the son of Mary.

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #146: "Angels From the Realms of Glory" (V 1,4,5)

Angels from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story,
now proclaim Messiah's birth.

Refrain:

Come and worship, come and worship;
worship Christ, the newborn King.

Saints, before the altar bending,
watching long in hope and fear,
suddenly the Lord, descending,
in his temple shall appear.

Though an infant now we view him,
he shall fill his Father's throne,
gather all the nations to him;
every knee shall then bow down.

Pastoral Prayer

Eternal God,
a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday.
They pass as quickly as one night's watch.
Whatever the significance of this new year,
yesterday morning was the same as the dawning of every day
since you first created life and light and proclaimed it all "very good."
We acknowledge your lordship over the world you have made
and over the creatures you have placed in it.
We acknowledge your lordship over us—
feeble creatures who vainly strive to be masters of the universe
you made and over which you still rule.
We are very impressed with our technology—
indeed, it is very impressive—
but our inventions are made with the brains and skills
and the knowledge and zeal that you impart.
As we move further into this new year,
we affirm with confidence your lordship in the future,
based on our conviction that you have been Lord from the beginning.
We are sure of nothing as we face the future,
except that you remain Lord of the world
that you created and that you still love.
You have filled us with the light of your Word,
made flesh in Jesus Christ.
Let the light of faith shine in all we do,
that the one who is from everlasting to everlasting—
yet who was born among us and lived with us—
may continue to inspire the thoughts of our hearts
and the actions of our lives.
As you have led us in days past, so guide us now and always,
that our hearts may learn to choose your will
and our new resolves be strengthened.
Help us to face the future with confidence,
knowing that you have guided and led your people through the eons past,
and knowing also that you are a personal God,
concerned not just with the mighty forces of wind and weather
and of the destiny and fate of nations
but also with the joys and sorrows that characterize our lives.
You have filled us with the light of your Word,
made flesh in Jesus Christ.
Let the light of faith shine in all that we do,
that the one who is from everlasting to everlasting—
yet who was born among us and lived with us—
may continue to inspire the thoughts of our hearts

and the actions of our lives.

Bless especially this day those who are in need:
the people we do not know, whose hope for the future
is not buoyed by the experience of blessing in the past,
who have not known healing, or faith, or prosperity,
and who have no hope.

Bless also those known to us who need
to sense your healing presence today—
for those in need in our congregation and others who we know are in need
You have been our God in ages past,
and we know that you will continue to be our God in years to come.
In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we pray, **Amen.**

Benediction

May the love of God surround you,
the wisdom of Christ guide you,
and the power of the Holy Spirit encourage you
as you joyfully proclaim:
Our world belongs to God!
Amen.