

Worship Service for December 26th: 1st Sunday after Christmas

- New Testament: Luke 2:41-52
- New Testament: Colossians 3:12-17
- Psalm 148

Announcements:

- **Wednesday January 5th:** Bible Studies in St. George's at 7pm. Acts 5
- **Prayer Meeting:** We will be starting a prayer group in January 2022. Anyone who is interested should contact the minister. We will decide if we can do it on zoom or we meet in person. Date and venue will be decided later.
- All those who are not yet members of the church and who will love to become members should contact the minister.

Sermon Title: Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!

The last five psalms of the Psalter – Psalms 146, 147, 148, 149 & 150, are known as Halal psalms. That's because they begin with the Hebrew word, Halal, from which we get Hallelujah, or Praise the Lord.

Psalm 148 is the third of these five psalms. It sends out a most solemn and earnest call to all creatures of the earth, according to their ability to praise God their Creator, and to show forth His eternal power and Godhead, and to proclaim His universal glory. He calls on the heavenly hosts and the earthly creatures to fill the entire universe with their praise.

What does it mean to praise the Lord? We can sometimes use a phrase so much that it loses its meaning. To praise the Lord means to glorify Him, to exalt Him, to honour, adore, reverence, worship and thank Him for His goodness towards us.

Why? Because He spoke and created the entire universe from nothing to something; because He established the cosmos to last forever and never revokes His commands; because the name of the Lord is the only name we raise; because His stunning splendor ascends higher than the heavens; He anoints his people with strength and authority, showing his great favor to all his godly lovers, even to his princely people, Israel, who are so close to his heart.

There are seven different ways of praising God:

- We have the **halal** – the word *halal* is the source of “Hallelujah,” which is a Hebrew expression of praise to God. Hallelujah is generally translated as “Praise the Lord.” It is used to indicate the praise of people, including the king and also the praise of God. *Halal* praise is expressed in the sanctuary, especially in times of special festivals. It is practised by dancing.
- We also have the **yadah** which means to give thanks, laud and praise. As an expression of thanks or praise, it is a natural part of ritual or public worship as well as personal praise to God. **Yadah** is the act of lifting up your hands in devotion to God.
- Next, we have the **todah** is thanksgiving. It indicates thanksgiving in songs of worship. It is the sacrifice of praise. It is to look to God even when things are not going our way or when the world around us is going upside down -when we don’t feel like turning to God or praising Him. **Todah** is about praising God no matter what. The writer of Hebrews had the spirit of **todah** in mind when he wrote, “... let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which pledge allegiance to his name.” (Hebrews 13:15).
- The next form of praise is **Barouch**. It means to bow or kneel. In the extreme, it means to fall prostrate before the Lord in total surrender to his majesty. Psalms 95:6 invites us, “Oh come, let’s worship and bow down. Let’s kneel before Yahweh, our Maker.”
- Next form of praise is **Shabach**. Literally, it means to shout—to lift up your voice to the Lord in gratitude for the blessings you have received. Isaiah told the people, “Cry aloud and shout, you inhabitant of Zion; for the Holy One of Israel is great in the midst of you!” (Isaiah 12:6).
- Then there’s **Zamar**. It refers to playing an instrument to glorify God. We get a big dose of this in the 150th Psalm, where it says,

“Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet!
 Praise him with harp and lyre!
 Praise him with tambourine and dancing!
 Praise him with stringed instruments and flute!
 Praise him with loud cymbals!
 Praise him with resounding cymbals!”

- Then we have the **tehillah** which is glory, songs of praise and praiseworthy deeds. In some cases, it represents the words or song by which God is

publicly exalted or by which His glory is publicly declared. It is a song which praises or exalts God. It also represents deeds which are worthy of praise or deeds for which the doer deserves praise and glory. **Tehillah** is a combination of all the other praise forms – singing, shouting, dancing, clapping and rejoicing before the Lord.

There's the time in Exodus where God parts the waters of the Red Sea and delivers the people of Israel from the Egyptian army. When the waters return and the soldiers and their horses are drowned, Moses' sister, Miriam, grabs a tambourine and starts singing and dancing and beating out a rhythm. The other women join her in a wild frenzy of praise and celebration, shouting at the top of their lungs, "Sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea." (Exodus 15:21).

All of creation and its inhabitants in the heavens and the earth are called upon to praise God. We have been through so much these past two years, but God has been good to us. We are still alive and living in one of the safest places in the world during this pandemic. There is always something that we can praise God for if we look well. Praise the Lord at all times—when you're on top of the world and things couldn't be better; when you're down in the dumps, and things couldn't look worse. Praise the Lord continually, as long as you live.

As we come to the end of 2021 let us remind ourselves of how faithful God has been to us even in our darkest moments. As we offer the sacrifice of praise to God in obedience to the Psalmist, we would soon realize how faithful He has been indeed. When we praise God in our darkest moments, we are not denying the pains and challenges that we have been through; rather we are choosing to acknowledge that God has been with us in the midst of our trials and pains.

We will end with this hymn of invitation to praise the Lord from St. Francis of Assisi:

*All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.*

Prayer

Lord God, creator of heaven and earth, we bring you our prayers with glad and grateful hearts in this season of hope and joy.

For your image set within us all, calling us to love one another and to care for your creation, we give you thanks.

For the gift of your Son who redeems us and guides us to serve you in the world, we give you thanks.

For the energy and inspiration of your Holy Spirit, who equips us to meet the challenges we face, we give you thanks.

By your Holy Spirit, empower us to show your love to those for whom we pray this day:

For the Church and those who lead in it, as they seek to refresh ministries after months of pandemic restrictions . . .

For the world that you have asked us to care for amid the challenges the climate crisis creates...

For those who rule in the nations of the world, that they will attend to the needs of the most vulnerable and cries for justice in their lands . . .

For those who serve as teachers, instructors, and mentors, and for students who face a world of constant change and challenge . . .

For those who serve others as healers and caregivers, especially those feeling exhausted by the demands the pandemic has created on them and their workplaces . . .

For those struggling with poverty, homelessness, and hunger, and the challenges to recover amid steep economic pressures . . .

For those who mourn the loss of someone dear and those who feel alone or neglected...

For those imprisoned for defending truth and justice, and all who experience exclusion, powerlessness and oppression . . .

God of love, we give thanks for the many blessings you have given us throughout our lives. We are grateful to celebrate the birth of your greatest gift, our Saviour Jesus, once again. Bless the offerings we make in his name, and use them and us to serve you well in the coming year.

As this year of ongoing and unexpected challenges draws to a close, give us grateful hearts for what has been loving and life-giving; give us peace about things that have been painful; and focus our attention on emerging opportunities to grow closer to you and to each other. Keep us faithful in all we do in the name of Jesus Christ, our friend and saviour, who taught us to pray together:

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 evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Let the majesty of the Father be the light by which you walk, the compassion of the Son be the love by which you walk, the presence of the Spirit be the power by which you walk. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father Almighty, and the sweet fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you now and forever. Amen.