

**Sunday 2 January 2022**

# Covenant Service

(and Second Sunday of Christmas)



The idea of a covenant between a Christian and God appears frequently in the Bible. John Wesley, who started the Methodist movement, wrote a 'Covenant Prayer' to be read aloud once a year at a special service. It was meant to help people to open themselves more fully to God.

He developed a custom of holding Covenant Services near the beginning of a New Year. Typically, as here, the Covenant replaces the Creed

Wesley understood Christian discipleship as a Covenant relationship. It was like a marriage between two human beings on the one side and God in Christ on the other. Ephesians 5:21–33 says it all.

**Sermon and prayers of intercession** © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

**Liturgy** © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

**Bible readings** © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

- [The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.](#)
- The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- [To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm](http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm)

## Introduction and welcome

**HYMN 1 O Jesus I have promised** (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

## The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

**All Amen.**

The Lord be with you

**All And also with you.**

## The Preparation

**All Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

**All Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

Hear the words of the angel to Joseph:

‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’

Therefore, let us seek the forgiveness of God through Jesus the Saviour of the world.

**All** Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
we have sinned against you  
and against our neighbour  
in thought and word and deed,  
through negligence, through weakness,  
through our own deliberate fault.  
We are truly sorry  
and repent of all our sins.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for us,  
forgive us all that is past  
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life  
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All** Amen.

## **The Gloria**

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

**All** Glory be to God in Heaven,  
Songs of joy and peace we bring,  
Thankful hearts and voices raising,  
To creation's Lord we sing.  
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,  
Glory be to God our King:  
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,  
Bore the load of this world's sin;  
Only Son of God the Father,  
You have brought us peace within.  
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,  
Now your glorious reign begin:  
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,  
You we praise with one accord.  
None in heav'n or earth is like you,  
Only you are Christ the Lord.  
With the Father and the Spirit,  
Ever worshipped and adored:  
Ever worshipped and adored.**

## **The Collect for the Annual Covenant Service**

God of grace,  
through the mediation of your Son,  
you call us into a new covenant.  
Help us therefore to draw near with faith  
and join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All Amen.**

## **First reading**

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah

For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel.' See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labour, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.' For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord. *Jeremiah 31:7-14*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

## Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. *Ephesians 1:1-14*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN 2 Purify my heart**

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

## Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

**All Glory to you O Lord.**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me".') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. *John 1:1, 5-18*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**All Praise to you O Christ.**

## Sermon

In our Gospel reading today, we rehearsed a key Bible text about Jesus: 'the word became flesh'. It's saying that God so occupied human flesh that Jesus can be called God as well as human. As we start a New Year, how do we accompany the Word? What does it mean to be his disciple?

Our first hymn is well known in most Church circles. 'O Jesus I have promised' is famous in having a great many common tunes. In fact, it can be sung to others: try singing it to the tune of 'O little town of Bethlehem.' It's even possible to sing it to a folk tune, for example the minstrel from Disney's *Robin Hood*. In fact, we can sing most well-known hymns to a different tune while keeping the original words.

It's OK to sing a hymn to a different tune. True—some work better in some situations and others in contexts that differ. But so long as the words and the tune work together we can sing them and maintain a sense of worship. So far so good. The problem occurs when those words contradict, work against, the chosen music.

All of us here are called to follow the Lord Jesus. We are allowed to do so in all ways that are valid. It's entirely correct to express our Christian life in a huge number of different ways. Our backgrounds may include the Church of England, the Baptist or Roman or Methodist Churches, and so on. But we must beware of worshipping in ways that don't work, that do not follow the Word made flesh, that

contradict. Just as singing a well-known hymn to a tune that does not fit will destroy the words or the tune (or both) so we need to live the Christian life in a way that is authentically Christ-like. The words must fit the life.

Today is the first Sunday of a New Year. Many people mark the start of a New Year with a resolution of two: drink less and read more, smoke less and pray more. It's a chance to do a 'factory reset' so we seek to move from an inglorious past into a better future. In the same way, the Church often uses this Sunday as a way of re-committing itself to discipleship, moving from a position in which faith was some form of 'add on' or hobby and move toward something more fulfilling and Christ-like. We make resolutions and Covenants to help us customise our lives so they agree better with the Word, Jesus, and work with Him. The Word becomes flesh.

St John tells us that the *Word* became flesh. We call his event the 'incarnation'—literally, the taking on of flesh. We need God to come to birth in our flesh. He does so by sending us His Spirit. Clearly, that incarnation will be a different in scope and extent than it was in Jesus, but we must commit to moving toward that goal. We do so because, remember, Scripture says that the one who has not the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. We need the Word to become flesh in us.

The Word *became* flesh. Scripture is again clear that the Word, Jesus Christ, existed before time but God made the decision to become human flesh at an exact instant in time. Our own becoming Christlike also starts because of a human decision—ours. We commit to let God live in us. In practice, that decision is a daily occurrence. We commit and re-commit, continually seeking to be more like Jesus.

The Word became *flesh*. Jesus was wholly human as well as being wholly God. He was as human as you and me. In consequence we cannot say, 'But I'm only human!' because that's no longer a valid impediment. But we must be acceptable if God is to live in our soul. To make God visible we need purity of heart because, to slightly paraphrase the beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5, 'We see God in those who are pure in heart.' Part of our commitment, then, if not just to say, 'Yes!' to God is to make our actions agree with the intention. We do so in our flesh ... in our lives.

We're all human but differently so. We are each called to a different ministry and a form of discipleship that's customised according to who God has made us to be. That's what St Paul means when he talks about 'the Body of Christ.' If we are to become authentically the Body, if the Word is to become flesh in us, we need to change and amend. Those ministries will alter, change, transmute, develop with time—that's what Scripture means when it talks about changing from glory into glory.

And *that's* why we will say the Covenant in a moment. It's checklist acts much like a job description in an advert. It's looking to see if we are willing for our actions to agree with the Word and thereby lets him take flesh ... *our* flesh.

## The Covenant Prayer

Beloved in Christ, let us again claim for ourselves this covenant which God has made with his people, and take upon us the yoke of Christ. This means that we are content that he appoints us our place and work, and that he himself be our reward. I therefore invite you all to renew your Covenant with God the Almighty.

**All** I am no longer my own but yours.  
Put me to what you will,  
rank me with whom you will;  
put me to doing,  
put me to suffering;  
let me be employed for you,  
or laid aside for you,  
exalted for you,  
or brought low for you;  
let me be full,  
let me be empty,  
let me have all things,  
let me have nothing:  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things  
to your pleasure and disposal.  
And now, glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.  
And the covenant now made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven.  
Amen and Amen.

*It's wise to say this pray very slowly, maybe line by line and ponder every word.*

## Prayers of intercession

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, help us to mean it and give us the strength to apply it. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

**All** Amen.

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, help your Church to be new, pure and in complete communion with You. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

**All** Amen.

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we pray that the structures of the world will be renewed, become cleaner and realigned themselves with You. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we ask that you'll remind us to work to alleviate the suffering we see everywhere around us. And we pray for those whose suffering we see [...].

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we pray for those who have died —today, during this past year and those whose time in this earth will expire during this coming year. Prepare them to meet with you.

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

## **The peace**

Blessed are the peacemakers:

they shall be called children of God.

We meet in the name of Christ and Share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

**All And also with you.**

**HYMN 3 Of the Father's love begotten** (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

## The Dismissal

May God the Father keep you in all your days.

**All Amen.**

May God the Son shield you in all your ways.

**All Amen.**

May God the Spirit bring you healing and peace.

**All Amen.**

May God the Holy Trinity drive all darkness from you  
and pour upon you blessing and light.

**All Amen.**

And the blessing of God the Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with you now and remain with you always.

**All Amen.**

**HYMN 4 All I once held dear**

*(please click on this link to hear the hymn)*

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**All In the name of Christ. Amen.**

# The Liturgy of the Sacrament

## Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

**All and also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**All We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All It is right to give thanks and praise.**

Father, you made the world and love your creation.

You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.

His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.

And so we gladly thank you,

with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,

through Jesus Christ, our Lord;

and as we obey his command,

send your Holy Spirit,

that broken bread and wine outpoured

may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends  
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:

Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;

do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.  
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:  
Drink this, all of you;  
this is my blood of the new covenant,  
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,  
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,  
we proclaim his death and resurrection  
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

**All    Christ has died.**  
          **Christ is risen.**  
          **Christ will come again.**

Lord of all life,  
help us to work together for that day  
when your kingdom comes  
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,  
gather us in your loving arms  
and bring us with all the saints  
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,  
for ever and ever.

**All    Amen.**

## The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All 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.**

## Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,  
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ  
which he gave for you,  
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,  
and feed on him in your hearts  
by faith with thanksgiving.

**All** We do not presume  
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,  
trusting in our own righteousness,  
but in your manifold and great mercies.  
We are not worthy  
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.  
But you are the same Lord  
whose nature is always to have mercy.  
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,  
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ  
and to drink his blood,  
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body  
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,  
and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.  
**Amen.**

Communion is distributed.

### **Prayer after Communion**

All praise to you,  
almighty God and heavenly king,  
who sent your Son into the world  
to take our nature upon him  
and to be born of a pure virgin:  
grant that, as we are born again in him,  
so he may continually dwell in us  
and reign on earth as he reigns in heaven,  
now and for ever.

**All** Amen

**All** Almighty God,  
we thank you for feeding us  
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies  
to be a living sacrifice.  
Send us out  
in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work  
to your praise and glory.  
**Amen.**