

**Christ Church, Ipswich**  
**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2022**  
**Worship for the Sixth Sunday of Easter**  
**including the Baptism of Violet Fairbrother**

Hello. I hope all is well.

Today will be my last Sunday with you for three months as following a few days leave starting on this coming Friday, I begin my June/July sabbatical and I will be on summer leave for most of August. Thank you very much once again for the provision of my sabbatical. I am really looking forward to it. We will all miss being part of church life over the summer but we will very much look forward to joining you all again in September. We will next be with you for worship on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September. Our love and very best wishes to you all for the summer period.

I'm delighted to say that today's service will include Violet's Baptism towards the end of the service. It is so wonderful to be celebrating Violet's baptism today. We will be offering a warm welcome to Violet and all her family and we are very grateful to Revd David Rees who will be joining us after leading worship at St John's URC to conduct the baptism.

Our readings for this sixth Sunday of the Easter Season will be Psalm 67, which we'll say together in just a moment, and John 5:1-9 and Revelation 21:10-14, 21:22-22:5.

Let us worship God together:

**Call to worship**

God is of all time and all people. He will be gracious to us and bless us. His face will shine upon us. His saving power will be known among all nations. Come, to praise him and sing his song of grace. **Amen.**

**A gathering prayer**

Loving God,  
 as we gather in this our place of prayer and worship,  
 we pray for those gathered in their special places, wherever they are in the world  
 – in ones and twos, tens and twenties, or hundreds and thousands.  
 May our praise and our prayers overflow into the streets and the cities, the fields and the lanes,  
 so that a continual chorus of thanksgiving will echo in every corner of the earth,  
 and your name be exalted in all the world. **Amen.**

**Psalm 67**

*The Nations Called to Praise God*

- 1 May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,
- 2 that your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.
- 3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.**
- 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth.
- 5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.**
- 6 The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, has blessed us.
- 7 May God continue to bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth revere him.**

## BPW 5 Be still, for the presence of the Lord

1 Be still, for the presence of the Lord,  
the holy one, is here;  
come bow before him now  
with reverence and fear:  
in him no sin is found -  
we stand on holy ground.  
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,  
the holy one, is here.

2 Be still, for the glory of the Lord  
is shining all around;  
he burns with holy fire,  
with splendour he is crowned:  
how awesome is the sight -  
our radiant king of light!  
Be still, for the glory of the Lord  
is shining all around.

3 Be still, for the power of the Lord  
is moving in this place:  
he comes to cleanse and heal,  
to minister his grace -  
no work too hard for him,  
in faith receive from him.  
Be still, for the power of the Lord  
is moving in this place.

David Evans (1956-) © Thank You Music Ltd.

### *Our children go to Junior Church with our love and blessing*

#### **A prayer of adoration**

All-encompassing God, we bow in adoration.  
There is no need of sun or moon in the radiance  
of your majesty.  
We bow in adoration, basking in the light of your love,  
**and exalting your name.**

Son of God, we bow in adoration.  
Lamb of God, you light up our world with your glory.  
We bow in adoration, basking in the warmth  
of your saving grace,  
**and exalting your name.**

Holy Spirit, we bow in adoration.  
Blessing of God's goodness, you cause our hearts to leap for joy.  
We bow in adoration, basking in the power of the river of life,  
**and exalting your name.**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
we bow in adoration, basking in the eternal light,  
**and exalting in the powerful glory of your radiance. Amen.**

#### **A prayer of confession**

We have not yet learned to love as you love  
We have spoken praise in our mouths  
When our hearts were far from you  
The gifts you gave for our peace  
We have weaponized  
Yet, even in our failings  
Your love has never failed us  
Even when we turned you away  
You still choose to make your home among us  
Our hearts are troubled

We are enmeshed in fear  
Creation needs you  
Our families need you  
Our streets need you  
Our towns need you  
The soil needs you  
Our souls need you  
Heal us  
Forgive us  
Make us whole again. Amen

### An assurance of forgiveness

Beloved of God, hear the good news.  
 God's faithfulness is sure  
 God's love will not fail us.  
 In accordance with God's lovingkindness,  
 you are forgiven  
 you are welcome  
 you are home.  
 All glory and praise be to God for his unending love. **Amen.**

### A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Thank you for the hope and healing you bring about in our life, our world.  
 Thank you for guiding and using us to bring your light to others.  
 One day there will be no more darkness, no more pain or disappointment.  
 All people and nations will be healed and renewed.  
 We thank you, Lord, for your promise that all will be well. **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. 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.**

### R&S 492 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind  
 forgive our foolish ways!  
 Reclothe us in our rightful mind;  
 in purer lives thy service find,  
 in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard  
 beside the Syrian sea  
 the gracious calling of the Lord,  
 let us, like them, without a word,  
 rise up and follow thee.

3 O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
 O calm of hills above,  
 where Jesus knelt to share with thee  
 the silence of eternity  
 interpreted by love!

4 With that deep hush subduing all  
 our words and works that drown  
 the tender whisper of thy call,  
 as noiseless let thy blessing fall  
 as fell thy manna down.

5 Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
 till all our strivings cease;  
 take from our souls the strain and stress,  
 and let our ordered lives confess  
 the beauty of thy peace.

6 Breathe through the heats of our desire  
 thy coolness and thy balm;  
 let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
 speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
 O still, small voice of calm!

J.G. Whittier (1807-92)

### Gospel Reading

#### John 5:1-9

#### *Jesus Heals on the Sabbath*

5 After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. <sup>3</sup> In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed. <sup>5</sup> One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?' <sup>7</sup> The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.' <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' <sup>9</sup> At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

*Vision of the New Jerusalem*

<sup>10</sup> And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. <sup>11</sup> It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; <sup>13</sup> on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>22</sup> I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

*The River of Life*

**22** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; <sup>4</sup> they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

**Reflection**

In today's assigned reading from the Book of Revelation, we have before us John's vision of hope and healing for the world. He sees God and Jesus form the Temple in the new Jerusalem, and they are the light of the world. John sees the water of life flowing clear and bright like crystal, and the tree of life bearing fruit that will bring healing to all nations. Together the tree, water and light give life to all things – a hopeful picture of the future for all humanity and all God's creation.

Let's take a closer look at this final vision in Revelation. Here, John sees in great detail the new Jerusalem that has already been mentioned briefly early on in Revelation 21:2. The lectionary leaves out the lengthy description of the physical substance of the city (including its dimensions, the gates, the materials used), but I've included some of these verses within our reading and hopefully this gives us a sense of the details John discussed. I think that the details we just heard, along with those not read today, that is verses 15-21 which speak of the measurements and many precious jewels used in the elaborate building of the city, all contribute to the overall sense of the unbelievable extravagance that is at the heart of this passage: what awaits God's people includes every hope imagined and many that are beyond imagining.

Of course, what we find here is, as we find throughout the whole Book of Revelation, that John draws heavily on the Hebrew Bible and on the apocalyptic traditions and so the story is overflowing with allusions to these earlier writings. The Genesis traditions about Eden (Gen. 2:4–14) and its restoration (1 Enoch 25:1–7; 2 Enoch 8:1–8), and the prophetic traditions about the restoration of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:11; Tobit 14:4–7; 4 Ezra 8:52; 1 Enoch 90:28–42) are particularly important for today's reading. As with almost every part of Revelation, there is, unsurprisingly, a lot of disagreement about the level of influence any of these traditions had and to what extent John conformed to or developed the thinking found within the tradition. However useful such deliberations may well be in the search to understand the text, I think what remains most important for us to recognise is that however strange the language of Revelation sounds to us as contemporary readers, John the apocalypticist is using language that would have made a lot of sense to his intended audience. John and his first readers were highly likely to have been Jewish Christians living in exile following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and so by drawing on these well-established and well-known traditions, his words would have brought much comfort and hope.

We notice that the specific portion of the vision that's expressed in our reading highlights the all-inclusive nature of the blessings provided by this new Jerusalem. As we heard, in 21:22–27, a number of those blessings are expressed in terms of the safety or security of the people. Amazingly, this city needs no sun or moon, for 'the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb' (21:23). The same promise is repeated in 22:5. Now, whether God and the Lamb replace the sun and moon or outshine them is beside the point. The key message is that there will always be light. The inhabitants of this city won't need to worry anymore about whether there's enough light. There will always be light for all of them as they live their lives. Maybe the most remarkable promise regarding security comes in 21:25: the gates of this city 'will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.' This is amazing! Anyone can come and go at any time, and no one needs to feel threatened or insecure. People from the nations will come in, and they will all be welcome (21:26). This would have sounded incredibly welcoming to the first readers, and indeed just as it does to us today. Within this setting of divine light and safety, people from every nation will live in harmony. Only in 22:2 is the 'healing of the nations' spoken of directly, but the references to the 'nations' and 'kings' in 21:24 already indicate that the community envisaged is fully inclusive. People from all over will bring to it 'the glory and the honour of the nations' (21:26). Now I know that focussing on the diversity of this population in this vision introduces a very contemporary issue, but I think it is a justifiable emphasis on this picture of a city in which diversity and unity have found balance. We contemplate our own calling to be a diverse, inclusive, welcoming people who reveal a radical love for our neighbour in all that we do, in all that we are as community. We long for, pray for our nation, our world to be a place of divine light and safety, of glory and honour for all people.

There is more for us to discover here as beyond these physical characteristics of the city, we find the precious promise of God's presence. Several times in Revelation, John has anticipated the presence of God with God's people (eg. 7:15-17; 21:3-4). Here, that message is stated again and with power! We read that the new Jerusalem needs no temple because the city itself has become the dwelling place of God. Most important, God's presence with God's people here becomes not only continual worship (22:3) but the very gift of actually seeing the face of God. As many of us will be aware, in the Biblical tradition no human being can look at God's face (Exodus 33:12-23; John 1:18). But also within this tradition is the hope of God's people being in God's presence and seeing God's face (eg. Psalm 17:15, Matthew 5:8). Here John anticipates the fulfilment of that deepest longing, the gift of seeing God's face, living in God's presence, and thriving on that presence. As those who live in God, who live in the love and life of God today, may we be assured of the nearness of God, the grace of God, the goodness of God. May we all, everyone of us sense the welcome and embrace of God. Of course, we will gladly celebrate the loving welcome God gives to Violet very shortly. But this welcome and embrace is for us all and it is in God that we find fresh inspiration to thrive as people, and to do all we can to help others thrive.

We heard this passage ending with a reference to power: God and God's people 'will reign forever and ever' (22:5). Given the destructive power of Rome that would have been all too familiar to the first readers of Revelation, it may seem surprising that John concludes with reference to God's power, especially given that the opposing powers to Rome have all been destroyed. However, the power envisaged here, just as with the power inherent in the 'river of the water of life' (22:1) and in the 'tree of life' (22:2), is the power to give and sustain life. In fact, this whole vision of the new city is pulsing with health and life, isn't it, with this crystal clear river filled with the water of life and the tree of life for the healing of the nations. We see that Scripture ends as it began, with harmony among humans and creation and a tree in the midst of it all. And certainly, with regards to power, well, death has lost all power! Sin is nowhere! And people and the rest of creation exist together in the overwhelming peace of God the Creator. Sadly, this is almost the exact opposite of what we hear daily about creation in new reports about the climate crisis. It could be tempting to lose all hope that there is any beauty in our future and that of our world. Perhaps this ancient vision of a New Jerusalem, which, it is vital to note, takes place on the earth and not in some distant ethereal place, might inspire us, might give us hope and encourage us in our work and prayers for the environment. How will we use our God given power to give and sustain life?

Now, as I draw to a close, as we may well know, there have been some very bad interpretations of extravagant passages like the one before us today as people have endeavoured to identify each item in the reading with a particular expectation about life in a heavenly city. But this kind of view actually ruins the reading where the vision promises some gifts that are beyond imagining or describing. And fundamentally, this book, this passage was about hope in this life. It was written for Christians facing persecution and hardship, and its powerful imagery was shaped to encourage them to hang on to the promise that, in the end, light will triumph

over darkness, hope over despair, and all people, nations, and indeed all of creation, will be healed and made whole: truly 'all shall be well'. While this may seem far removed from our own world, there is much in our lives and in the world where God's hope and healing are needed. Today, we offer ourselves afresh to God, asking that he might use us as agents of hope and healing in a hurting world. Amen.

### ***A moment for reflection***

#### **R&S 620 For the healing of the nations**

1 For the healing of the nations,  
Lord, we pray with one accord;  
for a just and equal sharing  
of the things that earth affords.  
To a life of love in action  
help us rise and pledge our word.

2 Lead us, Father, into freedom;  
from despair your world release,  
that, redeemed from war and hatred,  
all may come and go in peace  
Show us how through care and goodness  
fear will die and hope increase.

3 All that kills abundant living,  
let it from the earth be banned:  
pride of status, race or schooling,  
dogmas that obscure your plan.  
In our common quest for justice  
may we hallow life's brief span.

4 You, Creator-God, have written  
your great name on humankind;  
for our growing in your likeness  
bring the life of Christ to mind;  
that by our response and service  
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)  
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#### ***Our prayers of intercession***

God of all life and all goodness,  
we entrust to you those places where all is not well –  
places where there is deep seated hatred and mistrust.  
We pray especially for Jerusalem;  
for the leaders and people of Israel and Palestine;  
for the people of Buffalo in America;  
and for all places where lives have been lost to,  
and are threatened by, the brutality of prejudice.  
We pray for Ukraine and all countries being bombed and destroyed  
because of the ideology of other powers and leaders;  
for all prisoners and casualties of war.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

We pray for all those who are victimised  
for their ethnicity, their religion, their sexuality;  
for those imprisoned for speaking out  
and protesting against corruption –  
in Russia, in Belarus, in Myanmar, in Hong Kong...  
We pray for the countries of NATO,  
and for those applying to join;  
for all who speak out for peace and justice:  
for all who work behind the scenes  
to bring reconciliation, stability and restraint.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

We pray for those places where lives are being lost  
to extreme temperatures, to floods and to drought –  
especially in India, Australia, across East Africa...  
We pray for places where children are starving  
especially in Afghanistan, Yemen, Ethiopia...  
and we pray too for the hungry children of our own nation.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

We pray for all hospitals, workplaces, schools and homes;  
for those under huge pressures;  
for those who have no job security;  
for those who are bullied;  
for those who suffer behind closed doors.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

We pray for those in the news, whose lives  
are playing out before the eyes of the world;  
we pray for journalists to be protected;  
for truth to be upheld;  
for integrity to be the mark of all in public office  
and positions of influence.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

And we pray for our church  
and the communities we serve;  
we pray for one another;  
for our families;  
for our neighbours, our friends;  
for all who today feel sad, frightened or alone.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

And we pray for one another; and entrust to you those things that worry us; those situations we feel  
helpless in; those decisions that burden us; those losses that overwhelm us.

Loving God, we pray especially for those who have lost loved ones recently. We pray for Moira, her sister  
Esther and all the family following the sad loss of her dear Mum, Mona. We think also of those who are  
facing challenges with their health. We pray for all those among us who are receiving treatment and  
medical help at the moment. We pray also for all our dear church friends in residential care and all those  
unable to join us here at this time.

*We bring other friends and loved ones before God in a moment of quiet.*

Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

#### **R&S 489 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart**

1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art—  
thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
 thou ever with me and I with thee, Lord;  
 thou my great Father, thy child let me be,  
 thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
 be thou my dignity, thou my delight,  
 thou my soul's shelter, and thou my strong tower;  
 raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise,  
 thou mine inheritance, now and always;  
 thou and thou only, the first in my heart,  
 High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,  
 grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;  
 heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
 still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Ancient Irish poem tr. Mary E. Byrne (1880-1931) and Eleanor H. Hull (1860-1935) altd

**Junior Church will return when Revd David Rees has arrived and before 'As the sun rises' is sung**

**Action Song      As the sun rises on a new day**

*As the sun rises on a new day,  
 May our hearts say, 'God is good to us.'  
 As the sun rises on a new day,  
 May our songs say, 'You are faithful God.'*

*As the sun rises on a new day,  
 May our hearts say, 'God is good to us.'  
 As the sun rises on a new day,  
 May our songs say, 'We are grateful Lord.'*

1 Your loving kindness is new every morning,  
 Through every season and change.  
 Nothing can hinder the love you have for me,  
 Nothing will stop me from singing your praise!  
*As the sun rises on a new day...*

2 Vaster than oceans is your love towards me,  
 More than I'll ever contain.  
 Goodness and mercy in every new morning,  
 Love never-ending for all of my days.  
*As the sun rises on a new day...*

3 All of creation will tell of your glory,  
 Your love forever proclaimed.  
 Songs rising up, we'll awaken the morning,  
 Voices together declaring your praise!  
*As the sun rises on a new day...*



## **Celebrating the Christian Baptism of Violet Fairbrother**

Led by Revd David Rees

Minister of the Ipswich and East URC Pastorate

### **The Apostles' Creed (R&S 759)**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

### **R&S 420 The Lord bless you and keep you**

The Lord bless you and keep you:  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,  
and be gracious unto you:  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,  
and give you peace.

from Numbers 6:24-26

### **R&S 572 Colours of day dawn into the mind**

1 Colours of day dawn into the mind,  
the day has begun, the night is behind.  
Go down in the city, into the street,  
and let's give the message to the people we meet:

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,  
open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,  
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

2 Go through the park, on into the town;  
the sun still shines on, it never goes down.  
The light of the world is risen again;  
The people of darkness are needing our friend.

3 Open your eyes, look into the sky,  
the darkness has come, the Son came to die.  
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,  
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is here.

Sue McClellan, John Pac, Keith Ryecroft. 1974  
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### **A sending out prayer**

Glorious God, you shine your light  
into the dark places of our lives and of our world.  
Gentle God, you touch us with your healing love and make us whole.  
We ask you to be with us and shine through us this week,  
and use us to bring hope and healing to others. **Amen.**

### **The Blessing**

May the mind of the Father inspire and renew us.  
May the Word of Life invigorate us with new faith and hope.  
May the Spirit breathe fresh vision into expectant hearts.

And, may the grace and the mercy, the peace and the love  
of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with and within us,  
and those we love,  
this day and evermore. **Amen.**

### **The Grace**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore. Amen.**