**The First Sunday after Christmas,**

**The Last in Our Exploration Together.**

**At St Andrews’s, Gisborne.**

**31ST. December, 2023.**

**Please remain seated**

***And* Join in singing the Introit Hymn … (words printed below …)**

**3-30 https://youtu.be/yZDqBt7qqsg**

**“Prepare the Way, O Zion” -- we join with Christians from around the World:**

 **This is a Swedish Melody Tune: *BEREDEN VÄG FÖR HERRAN*. Swedish Melody;**

 **Swenska Psalmboken, Stockholm, 1697 .Words: Frans Mikael Franzen (1772-1847**)

**As we try to sing together, along with**

 **the choir of First Church, New Plymouth, Lincoln; Nebraska, USA**

 **Led by Tom Trenney who plays the Organ of our opening Praise. [Words below.]**

**` Prepare the way, O Zion! Your Christ is drawing near!**

 **Let every hill and valley, a level way appear.**

 **Greet One who comes in glory, foretold in ancient story**

 **O blest is Christ who came, in God’s most Holy Name**

 **He brings God’s rule O Zion; he comes from heaven above:**

 **His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth and Love.**

 **Lift high your praise resounding: for Grace and Joy abounding,**

 **O blest is Christ who came, in God’s most Holy Name.**

 **Fling wide your gates, O Zion! Your Saviour’s rule embrace;**

 **The tidings of salvation, proclaim in every place.**

 **All lands will be rejoicing, their adoration voicing;**

 **O blest is Christ who came, in God’s most Holy Name.**

**\*\*\*Welcome to ALL Present : Led by : \*\*\* Ruth McLennan**

 **Reader is : >>> Gina Hughes**

**\*\*\*Our Call to Worship;**

 **From ISAIAH, ch. 61 : from vs. 10ff. (adapted ©cbyates 2023.)**

*L : I celebrate and shout because of my Lord God.*

 *His righteousness and justice are the very clothes I choose to wear.*

 *They are worth far more than any Bride’s best jewellery.*

*All :* **The Lord will bring about justice and right living everywhere**

 **like flowers in the desert who know how to bloom in season.**

*L : Jerusalem, I will speak up for your good.*

 *I will never be silent until you are safe and secure***,**

**All : Then you will glow brightly, like a burning flame.**

 **Everyone will see what You have done.**

 **You will be seen by every nation and people. AMEN.**

**\*\*\*1-PRAISE : CH4 161O God our help in ages past, …**

**O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,**

**our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!**

**Under the shadow of thy throne thy saints have dwelt secure;**

**sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defence is sure.**

**Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,**

**from everlasting thou art God, to endless years the same.**

**A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone;**

**short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.**

**Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away;**

**they fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.**

**O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,**

**be thou our guard while troubles last, and our eternal home.**

**\*\*\*Prayer of Approach, Confession, and Assurance.**

*L : Almighty and loving God; we come to give You praise and glory.*

 *You have been part of our lives for as long as we can remember.*

 *Others told us that You were a source comfort, peace and strength..*

**All : God, our loving Father,**

 **You have been teaching us to look with the eyes of faith,**

 **and to see that Your love is always at work all around us.**

*L : Son of God, Jesus, the promised One born at Bethlehem.*

**All : You were born of our flesh and blood,**

 **Your birth has changed the course of human history forever:**

 **for You were sent to proclaim justice and honesty in all things.**

*L : Holy Spirit of God, that moves when, and where; -- as it wills.*

**All : You can and still do touch our lives at so many points;**

 **calming fears; giving hope; setting us free to live life fully.**

 **Help us now to examine ourselves openly in Your presence.**

*L : … Lord; because oof our human nature, …it is … …*

**All :Through our ignorance, human weakness, and deliberate actions,**

 **we continually betray Your trust, we belittle Your love,**

 **we deny forgiveness to others, and we deceive ourselves.**

 **For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, forgive what is in the past.**

 **Lord! Have mercy upon us.**

 *[ -- silence -- ]*

*L : In humility and in true sincerity, we gratefully accept Your forgiveness.*

**All : Thanks be to the Creator, the Son, and Holy Spirit that this is so.**

 **May Your Word speak Your truth to each one of us to-day. Amen.**

**>>1-READING :** **Gospel of MATTHEW. Ch. 2 : vs 1-12**

*The Wise Men followed the Star …*

**\*\*\*2-PRAISE : CH4 326 As with gladness, men of old**

**As with gladness men of old**

**did the guiding star behold,**

**as with joy they hailed its light,**

**leading onwards, beaming bright;**

**so, most gracious Lord, may we**

**evermore be led to thee.**

**As with joyful steps they sped,**

**Saviour, to thy lowly bed,**

**there to bend the knee before**

**thee, whom heaven and earth adore;**

**so may we with willing feet**

**ever seek thy mercy-seat.**

**As they offered gifts most rare**

**at thy homely cradle bare;**

**so may we with holy joy,**

**pure, and free from sin’s alloy,**

**all our costliest treasures bring,**

**Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.**

**Holy Jesus, every day**

**keep us in the narrow way;**

**and, when earthly things are past,**

**bring our ransomed souls at last**

**where they need no star to guide,**

**where no clouds thy glory hide.**

**In the heavenly country bright,**

**need they no created light;**

**thou its light, its joy its crown,**

**thou its sun which goes not down;**

**there for ever may we sing**

**alleluias to our King.**

**>>2-READING : Gospel of MARK, Ch. 12 : 28--33**

Two greatest Commandments

**>>3-PRAISE : WOV 571 A new Commandment, I give unto you …**

**A new commandment I give unto you**

**that you love one another as I have loved you,**

**that you love one another as I have loved you.**

**By this shall people know that you are my disciples**

**if you have love one for another.**

**By this shall people know that you are my disciples**

**if you have love one for another.**

 *8*

**>>3-READING : Gospel of MATTHEW, Ch. 25 : 31 -45**

*The Dilemma : Are we Sheep OR Goats*

**++ Our REFLECTION on the THEME of TODAY’S SCRIPTURE**

 **led by a Minister Emeritus Revd Dr Clive Yates**

**TOPIC for TODAY : ETHICS ?? DO WE “ Make a difference ” ?**

**\*\*\*4-PRAISE : CH4-142 Says Jesus, “Come and Gather round”**

**Says Jesus, “Come and gather round.**

**I want to teach my friends**

**Some truths about the love I bring,**

**the love that never ends.**

**Look to the child, here in your midst,**

**Who has so much, and more to say**

**of what it means to follow me,**

**to come and walk my way.”**

**Christ speaks to us who, growing old,**

**get burdened down with care;**

**while caution reigns, we seldom see**

**God’s presence everywhere.**

**He points to gifts that children bring –**

**the will to risk, the trust to dare,**

**through which, no matter where we are,**

**we’ll find God always there.**

**When was it that we first forgot**

**that questions helped us grow,**

**or lost the openness to ask**

**and learn what we don’t know?**

**Christ points to gifts that children bring,**

**the searching heart and lively mind**

**which let God’s kingdom grow in those**

**who seek until they find.**

**Lord Jesus, we have gathered round**

**to hear you teach your friends**

**the truths about the love you bring,**

**the love that never ends.**

**We look to children in our midst,**

**for they have much, and more to say,**

**and join with them to follow you,**

**to live and walk your way.**

**\*\*\*Our OFFERTORY; DOXOLOGY, and RE-DEDICATION :**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow:**

**Praise God all creatures here below;**

**Praise Him above, ye heavenly host:**

**Praise Father; Son, and Holy Ghost.**

*L : Gracious and all powerful God,*

 *Your love for us is as obvious as the things we have,*

 *and the life we have been given.*

**All : Receive our offerings and our donations, and our worship,**

 **for these are a sign of our love we have for you.**

 **May our giving teach us more about who you are**

 **and encourage us to seek for new avenues**

 **where we can be of service to others in Your name.**

 **By the power of your Spirit,**

 **gift us these talents, we most earnestly pray. Amen**

**>>>Our Responsive Prayers of Intercession for Others**

*Response L : Lord hear these our prayer.*

 **All : And in your love, answer it with Grace**

**\*\*\*5-PRAISE CH4 511 Your Hand, O God, has guided ….**

**Your hand, O God, has guided your flock, from age to age;**

**the wondrous tale is written, full clear, on every page;**

**our forebears knew your goodness, and we their deeds record;**

**and both of this bear witness:**

***one church, one faith, one Lord.***

**Your heralds brought glad tidings to greatest as to least;**

**they summoned all to hasten and share the great King’s feast;**

**and this was all their teaching, in every deed and word,**

**to all alike proclaiming:**

***one church, one faith, one Lord.***

**Through many a day of darkness, through many a scene of strife,**

**the faithful few fought bravely to guard the nation’s life.**

**Their Gospel of redemption, sin pardoned, life restored,**

**was all in this enfolded:**

***one Church, one Faith, one Lord.***

**Your mercy will not fail us, nor leave your work undone;**

**with your right hand to help us, your victory shall be won;**

**by mortals and by angels your name shall be adored,**

**and tis shall be their anthem:**

***one Church, one Faith, one Lord.***

**++ The Blessing for the New Year :**

*L : May the light of Christ lighten all our ways, at all times;*

 *may the Cross of Christ guard and go before us.*

**All : We each go free to help weave Christ's purposes;**

 **we each go loved to serve Christ's weakest ones;**

 **we each go clothed in renewed forgiveness,**

 **venturing forward, confident of Your continued guidance.**

 **May we each go our separate ways in Christ's name**

 **journeying on together in Christ's world.**

 **[ AMEN AMEN AMEN ]**