

GIFTS FOR A KING: Service With A Focus On Christmas Giving

Suggested Sunday: festival of 'Christ the King', last in church year and next before Advent. A time to focus on giving to the King who came to earth for us, who gave his life for us, who now reigns in heaven and who will appear again both as our saviour and as our judge. Traditionally known as 'Stir Up Sunday' because of the collect for the day, we pray that this service may help 'stir up in us...a compassion that cannot be ignored'¹ and that may be reflected in our Christmas giving to charitable work at home and overseas, especially work with the poor, the hungry and the dispossessed.

Components of service (may be adapted by individual churches according to their various traditions and preferred order of proceedings)

- **Call to worship:** 'To God, the only God, who saves us through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and for ever' (Jude 1:25)
- **Hymns/songs:** See suggestions below
- **Bidding prayer/collect:** 'Stir up in us, Lord, the wills of your faithful people; that we who have abundantly benefited from your goodness may feel a compassion that cannot be ignored, until there is no poverty and injustice left to feel uncomfortable about' (*adapted from Collect for 25th Sunday after Trinity/Next before Advent; also from The Sanctuary* [see note 1])
- **Opening prayers:** adoration, thanksgiving, confession, assurance
- **The Lord's Prayer**
- **Children's slot:** What do you look forward to at Christmas? Presents? What would you give to a king? Who were the wise men giving to? Whose birthday are we celebrating? Who should get the best presents? How do we give them to Jesus? But we can have smaller presents or party bags...
- **Nicene Creed** ('Christ the King' Sunday dates from 1925 – the 1600th anniversary of Council of Nicaea. Creed emphasises Christ 'whose kingdom shall have no end')
- **Readings:** from Old Testament I Chronicles 29: 6-14; Psalm 24; from New Testament Matthew 25: 31-46
- **Sermon** (see below; also ideas in www.casc-aid.org.uk under 'talks and sermons')
- **Anthem:** various, e.g. 'Lift Up Your Heads' (Hopkins) or hymn (see suggestions below)
- **Intercessions:** including 'We give thanks for all that has been achieved by the generosity of individuals and the hard work of agencies to alleviate poverty and hardship wherever it occurs. We pray that you will enable this work to continue and to grow. Today, to all who are hungry, help us to give daily bread; to all who are thirsty, help us to supply fresh water; to all who are homeless, may we provide shelter. For what we do for the least of your children, we are doing for you'. ¹
Alternatively, 'Eternal God, you brought the world into being and gave it life. Then you gave it yourself, on the cross of human suffering. Show us a different kind of world, a different cost of living, where the pain will not be eased by the money we spend on ourselves but by the way we spend ourselves for others, and the way we value life.' ²
- **Offering** (might include pledges?)
- **Offertory prayer:** 'Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the majesty...for all things come from you, and of your own do we give you' (I Chronicles 29: 11,14)

¹ from 'Prayer For All Those Living In Poverty' (*adapted*) www.thesanctuarycentre.org

² from *Iona Abbey Worship Book*, Wild Goose Publications [2005], p.156

SUGGESTED SERMON POINTS

- Christ the King Sunday is a timely reminder that the baby whose birth we will be celebrating in a few weeks' time is the king who reigns over all both in this world and the next. He was acknowledged as such by the Magi at his birth (Matthew 2: 1, 11) and by a dying criminal at his death (Luke 23: 42). The church year has gone full cycle. As we prepare for Christmas, what gifts are we preparing for a king who has given everything for us and whom we too will encounter one day?
- This is the last Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday, Advent Sunday, we will begin to focus on the expectation of the birth of the Messiah here on earth. Today, we are focusing on his kingship in heaven. The circle is complete. But because it is a circle, there is no separation of the two. It is seamless. As Psalm 24 reminds us, preparations for the arrival of the King of Glory begin here, on the earth that God created. Our preparations for Christmas should therefore include preparations for our own ultimate reception into Christ's kingdom (Matthew 25: 31-46).
- From Advent Sunday onward, we will probably embark on a seasonal round of special services: Advent, Christingle, carol services, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day etc. But worship is not just about the format or content of a service (see Amos 5:21). Worship is about living our lives to put God first. The parable of the sheep and goats makes it very clear that if Jesus comes first in our lives, this means putting 'the least' first out of deference to him.
- How do we do this? One way is to emulate the Magi, who gave valuable gifts in their entirety to the baby King (Matthew 2:11). Another is to look at John the Baptist's answer to those of his own followers who asked him how they should prepare to meet Christ. (Luke 3:11) Whatever we have, we should give half away to those who have nothing. This is 50/50 giving. (See www.casc-aid.org.uk, esp. '50/50 Giving')
- This may seem tough, but Christmas is a good place to start. 50/50 giving is easy at Christmas. It does not mean spending more, but spending differently. It begins by taking stock of what we ourselves plan to spend, and resolving to donate at least an equal amount to charity – whether by outright giving, by alternative giving, by buying gifts from charity shops etc.
- In this country we spend tens of billions in the high streets through seasonal shopping, many of us without being aware of how much we are spending until the bills come in. If we give as much as we spend at Christmas, we could literally make a world of difference, to ourselves as well as to others.
- We have received everything from God. 'The earth is the Lord's' (Psalm 24); 'all things come from you' (1 Chronicles 29: 14). It should not be any hardship to give to God at least half of the equivalent value of gifts that we have not even yet bought or received, and which we often do not need or even want for ourselves.
- 50/50 giving does NOT mean not enjoying Christmas! Rather, it means enjoying it more because in focusing our giving on the one whose birthday we are celebrating, we will not only know we are making a substantial difference in other people's lives but will also be making a substantial difference in our own. (See www.casc-aid.org.uk, especially 'The Cost of Christmas' and 'Suggestions for Talks and Sermons')

SUGGESTED HYMNS AND CHORUSES

Hymns and songs: Could include 'Lord, thy church on earth is seeking'; 'Take my life, and let it be...'; 'Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord'; 'O God of mercy, God of might'; 'For the healing of the nations'; 'He is the Lord, and he reigns on high'; 'Great is the darkness that covers the earth'; 'At this time of giving'; 'Beauty for brokenness'; 'Name of all majesty'; 'The earth belongs to God'; etc.

Other suggestions for music may be found at
www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet

Following communion, 'Allelujah, sing to Jesus' may be appropriate.

Also see below: 'Thine, O Lord, is the glory', for use during or after an offertory.

Alternative hymn: Thine, O Lord, Is The Glory (Tune: CASC-aid)

Based on I Chronicles 29: 11,16

Ruth Grayson
 arr. Peter Else

1.&4. Thine, O Lord, is the glo - ry, The po - wer, the maj - es - ty; And
 2. Wise men came to wor - ship, They brought gifts fit for a king. For
 3. God gives us life; He gave us His own for our heav - en - ly gain; So

5
 of thine own do we give thee, For all things come from thee.
 life, for death, for none oth - er, They gave God ev - ery - thing.
 help us, Lord, through our giv - ing to show such love a - gain.

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