

# **St Swithun's Church Family**

## **2 Before Lent**



**7<sup>th</sup> February 2021**  
**10am Zoom**

**Or use this booklet to join  
together with us in Spirit**

*Please use this booklet to **worship with us** on zoom at 10am – or read through this service knowing that we are joining our prayers together in Spirit.*

*Create a sacred space – if possible gather a candle and a cross if you can find them. You could light your candles throughout the worship to represent the light we celebrate at Candlemas.*

*The children might like to use the Sunday school resources provided by Izzy.*

*In addition we will be audio recording today's sermon which will be uploaded to the website [www.saintswithuns.org.uk](http://www.saintswithuns.org.uk)*

*There are various prayer resources and other things to look at on the website – if you have any feedback or anything to share please let me know.*

**Giving - if you usually give your collection on a Sunday morning in cash, and you are able to, please put this aside each week to bring to church when you are next able to. Even better would be to set up your giving online ('Saint Swithun's PCC' ; 60-05-11 ; 16126718 ; NatWest Bank) if you haven't already done this.**

*You might like to enhance your worship by singing or listening to a hymn or a song at various points – I have a few suggestions below – you tube is a great resource...*

**Amazing Grace**

<https://youtu.be/50EcxYILxAU>

**All are welcome in this place**

<https://youtu.be/js8RtT0mJpc>

**Love divine all loves excelling**

<https://youtu.be/igs3mNsppsI>

**All my hope on God is founded**

<https://youtu.be/W3LCGh02Vew>

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[www.saintswithuns.org.uk](http://www.saintswithuns.org.uk)

# Introduction

Today we read the opening passage of the Gospel of John as well as a passage from Proverbs. In these Bible readings we hear about Wisdom and Word. Today in our worship I hope we will reflect on our images of God and enter into the mystery of God's love more fully as we grow together in faith.

## The Gathering

### The Greeting

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

**And also with you**



### Prayers of preparation

Welcome to this time of worship

**This gathering is home to all who come.**

Welcome to this sacred space

**Friend and stranger, saint and sinner**

**welcome to all who gather together.**

Come with hope or hesitation;

**come with joy or yearning;**

**all who hunger, all who thirst for life in all its fullness.**

Generous God:

**touch us, make us one, give us peace!**

### Prayers of Penitence

Jesus said: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden,  
and I will give you rest."

You are tireless in seeking out the lost; we write them off.

Generous God: **Share mercy with us.**

You do not give up on a single one;  
we give up even on ourselves.

Generous God: **Share mercy with us.**

You have a joy that is without measure;  
we accept limits to our compassion.  
Generous God: **Share mercy with us.**

## **The Absolution**

Be healed, be whole, your sins are forgiven.  
**Amen**

## **Glory to God**

Glory to God in the highest,  
**and peace to all people on earth.**

Rejoice knowing that God loves us, liberates us  
and makes us whole. Today we will sing together:

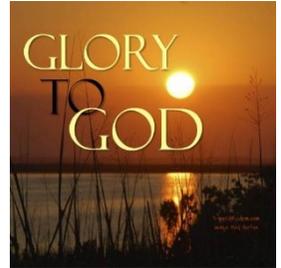
**Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.**

**'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.**

**Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.**

**The Lord has promised good to me,  
His Word my hope secures;  
He will my Shield and Portion be,  
As long as life endures.**

**When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.**



# The Liturgy of the Word

## The Collect

Let us pray that we may know and share the light of Christ.

God of us all, give us reverence for all creation and respect for every person, that we may mirror your likeness in Jesus Christ.

**Amen**



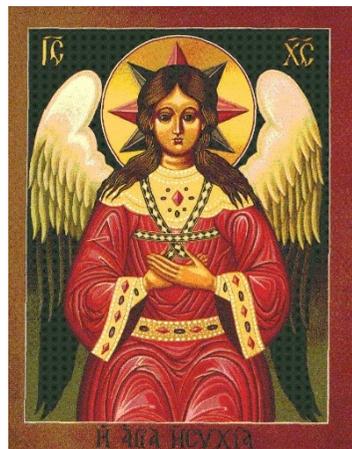
## **Bible Reading** *Proverbs 8.1, 22-31*

A reading from the book of Proverbs.

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

For the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**



## **Gospel Reading**     *John 1: 1-14*

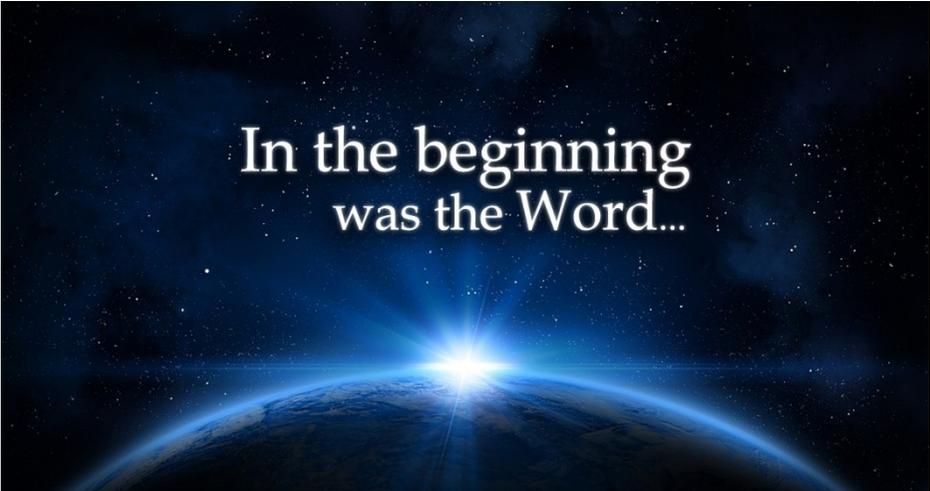
Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you O Christ.**



**In the beginning  
was the Word...**

## **Sermon** *Mother Juliet*

When we think about God – what do you imagine – what words or images come to mind?

When we look at the images of God that we find in the Bible – we can see the vastness of God. We are given so many different pictures or ideas about what God is like.



Names are important for our identity – our names convey to the world something of who we are...

How do you like your name? Has it helped shape you? Would you prefer a different name – if so what and why?

Rosy and I have many things in common – but one of them is that we both have daughters called Sophia... who both live up to the meaning of their name...

The name Sophia means wisdom... or Holy Wisdom. Our first reading today tells us about this Wisdom – this Sophia – which tells us about God...

*Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.*

Wisdom is a feminine image of God which is connected with the Logos, the Greek word for God's Word, which we heard in our second reading today – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God".

This reading from the beginning of the Gospel of John is always heard at Christmastime - it tells us about Jesus being there from the beginning and that the Word is a thread that runs throughout all creation. It is saying that Jesus is the Word - that Jesus is Holy Wisdom.

When I asked you at the beginning how you imagine God – honestly – did we stick with one idea and one image?

Often we stick too narrowly to a particular or specific image of God – too often I encounter people on their journey of faith who are terrified by an angry God or are fearful that they are not good enough because their image of God is one of judgement from on high – missing the importance of God who is loving and merciful....

Perhaps our words we use in our worship need to be carefully reflected on – does our liturgical life inhibit the mystery, the height, depth and width of God.

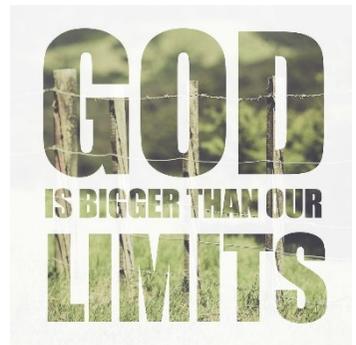
God is our Father, our Lord, our King, our Brother, our Friend, our Lover. God is a Rock, a Shield, a Fortress, a Strong Tower, a River. God is Saviour, Redeemer, Deliverer. God is a Consuming Fire, God is Power, Strength. God is our Mother, the one who labours, and brings her people to Birth. God is Wisdom.

These are just a few of the Biblical images of God. How does it feel to pray to God, Holy Wisdom, Sophia? How does it change the way you live out your faith if you spend time with God who you name and image with the wonderful pictures and words we are given from the Bible?

For if we take Scripture seriously, we must see that God has revealed Godself, in many many more ways than the limited words we too often use. Our vision of God can be enlarged. The only thing we have to lose are the limits we have set on God.

As we journey deeper into God on our Christian journey, let us not limit God by limiting the metaphors and images we use.

As we grow in faith, recognizing that we are in the image of God, let us also not limit each other.



Often we want to label others – to parcel them up into our way of understanding them rather than to see them in all their glory... we have to remember that other people are not the sum of the limits we impose on them just as God is not restricted to our limited ideas about who God is – God is beyond our understanding.



How we understand others is often more about our own inability to see with open eyes and open hearts – do we set limits on what we think someone will be like based on what they look like, what they sound like, what society says about them, what we have previously encountered.



As an inclusive church – we need to always remember to align ourselves with God's limitless love and to see those we encounter as made in the image of God. Often these limits spring from our fear and insecurities – the more scary the world feels to us the more we want to parcel it up into something simplistic – often reducing complexity into polarized black and white thinking. It is fear

that drives us to want to be right. Faith, however, encourages us to see more fully – to go beyond our fears and to see with open eyes and open hearts. To shine a light into those fears – faith drives us beyond the urge to be right into being loving.

Think of the last big argument or disagreement you have had – would a focus on being loving instead of being right have changed that situation for you? Seeing others as God sees all people is as simple as recognizing in Jesus the love that God has for all people. Love enough to become one of us and to live amongst us. It is harder for us to begin to see the complexity that is behind that great love.

Our readings today help us to begin to glimpse Godself. They are telling us that Jesus is Word and also Wisdom of God.

They also point us to God's love, God's light, and to the fact that this light is with us always.

Jesus is our light and no darkness in our lives can overcome that light – even though at the moment many of us feel a lot of overwhelming fear and darkness. Our own light may go out for a while leaving us feeling lost in the darkness. But being part of the church family means that someone else nearby is carrying a light and can hold that up for us until our anxiety and gloominess passes. We need each other – and we need to see each other fully as God's children.



Together let us shine God's limitless love, God's light into the world – let us support each other and shine that light for each other whatever challenges we continue to face. Let us grow in faith, hope and love as we dare to see each other and to see God more fully. Let us look beyond our narrowness into the vastness of God's love.

Amen

## **Affirmation of faith**

**We believe in God,**

**Creator of the world and of all people;**

**and in Jesus Christ, incarnate among us,**

**Word and Wisdom, who died and rose again;**

**and in the Holy Spirit, present with us,**

**to guide, strengthen, and comfort.**

**We believe, God, help our unbelief.**

**Amen.**

# Prayers

Let us pray to let God's light shine in the darkness.

We pray that we will be a church community defined by what we are open to, not by what we fear; by the excess of our love not the walls along our borders. May our church be a place of inclusion for all. Help us to remember the importance of hospitality despite our inability to meet physically.

God in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

We pray for those things in our lives which feel overshadowed by doubt, fear and gloominess - help us to act from faith and love as we navigate the challenges of daily life. May we always keep God's priorities at the heart of our lives and to shine a light into the world by acting to help our local and global neighbours. Help us to love others as you love us.

God in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Jesus reminds us to love one another as we are loved. We pray for all those whose lives are weighed down with difficulties. For any known to us who need light to shine into their lives. For - Fran and family, Lamar, Maureen, Karen, Paulette and their families, Andy and family, Philbert and family, Catherine and Alfrina and family, Betty, Fr Richard, Martin, Rossy and family, Kevin, Gwen, Pamela, Neil, Debbie, Elaine and family, Clinton, Francis, Cynthia, Diane, Harold, Ivy, Sean, Taneisha, Talabi, Susan, Edith, Vanda, Lorna, Ena and Stephen.

God in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Loving God, we remember all those who are now in eternal light - Carl, Gloria, Alan, Joseph, Sydney, Simone and John.

Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord

**And let light perpetual shine upon them**

Merciful God

**Accept these prayers,  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**

## The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray as Jesus taught us, (*the New Zealand Prayer Book*):  
**Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother  
of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven: The hallowing of your  
name echo through the universe! The way of your justice be  
followed by the peoples of the world! Your heavenly will be  
done by all created beings! Your commonwealth of peace and  
freedom sustain our hope and come on earth. With the bread  
we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one  
another, forgive us. In times of temptation and testing,  
strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the  
glory of the power that is love, now and for ever. Amen.**

## The Peace

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my own peace I give to you."  
May Christ's peace invade, flood and shake the foundations of  
our hearts and lives, in our community, in our daily lives,  
in our witness to the world; let peace break out!

The Peace of God be always with you!  
**And also with you.**

## The Notices

- *We will continue with online church during Lockdown.*
- *Happy Birthday to all those who have a birthday this week*



## Dismissal and Blessing

### The Blessing

May God bless us; may God keep us in the Spirit's care  
and lead our lives with love. May Christ's warm welcome shine  
from our hearts and Christ's own peace prevail through this and  
everyday. And the blessing of Creator, Redeemer, Spirit  
be with us always. **Amen.**

### The Dismissal

God is love. May we abide in this love. Today. Always.  
**Amen.**