

The Spiritual Connection- Reflection Service Epiphany Season



(Opening Hymn Zoom Service – words will be displayed on screen).

Opening Prayers

The Lord be with you: **And also with you.**

Reveal among us the light of your presence that we may behold your power and glory. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as Jesus came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of Christ's divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Spiritual Preparation- Confession and Absolution

Let us take a moment to bring before God the things which we have done wrong knowingly and unknowingly. Those things which weigh lightly and those things which weigh heavily on our hearts ...

**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.
Forgive us all that is past.
Renew us in body, mind and spirit
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

Almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
restore us in God's image and bring us to everlasting life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Gospel Reading: John 1:43-51

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Reflection

I love the mystical in both of these readings. The strong spiritual connection between God and humanity leaps out. God communicates with us. This is such a strong Christmas and epiphany season theme - showing that the separations between heaven and earth are diminished as God comes to us. We are reminded that our expectancy of looking for God, of listening out for God's calling and interaction in our lives is not without foundation. God comes to all of us. Sometimes we might tangibly feel God's presence, answers and guiding, we can feel held and beloved. Sometimes - maybe more often than not- our senses can feel dulled and God seems distant and faraway. We can offer heartfelt prayers and feel like the words are left hanging in a void. We can feel alone and during difficult and painful times we can feel forsaken. But God promises never to leave or forsake us. God promises us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But like all relationships we need to take time to nurture our own spirituality and our openness and intention in connecting with God.

In our first reading Samuel initially thinks it is Eli calling him. With Eli's guidance he attunes himself to be open to God. He listens, hears and responds. In our second reading Nathaniel hadn't known that Jesus had been aware of him and 'saw' him under the fig tree before they had even met. He is initially racist and rude, possibly he has heard of Jesus but has dismissed his ministry 'What good can come out of Nazareth?' he asks. But then he meets and 'sees' Jesus, as he too has been 'seen' and he listens, hears and responds to Jesus' calling. Both of these interactions speak to God making the first introduction – but perhaps that negates the relationship that was there before. Samuel had been dedicated to God's service by his mother at a very young age and under Eli's guidance was growing up in the temple learning the scriptures and spending time in prayer and worship. Whilst we don't know as much of Nathaniel's backstory it is most likely that as a Jewish man he too has been studying the scriptures and attending Temple. They both already have a good spiritual grounding, but these new connections are supernaturally powerful and intimate, with both touched by the mystical nature of these moments. They have been seen and called by God. Their faith and study has been rewarded with a deep awareness of the personal connection between humanity and God.

Passed and current knowledge of God is not always a necessary precursor. For some of us it may be a new and sudden realisation of God and God's desire of relationship with us. St. Paul we may remember is actually a persecutor of Christians when God dramatically speaks to and calls him. So if you don't have a background in faith, or if you do; if you are a first or twentieth generation believer; or if you have had people praying for you or not, God seeks to connect with you. This connection can feel real and alive or like a blurred flickering TV channel. Spiritual fine tuning can help us see and experience a fuller picture of God. What better connects you spiritually to God? What intentional steps can we take this week to create a focused space for communing with God? Through scripture, through music, through nature, through spiritual writings, through prayerful sensory space, through service. What is the fine tuning that works for you?

I will end by drawing attention to the last verse of the Gospel reading because Jesus' words here always make me smile. He says to his new disciple "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The Son of Man being Jesus, and /or the son of man being all humankind. Whichever – it is glorious! We can experience the heavenly and heaven experiences the earthly. There is an undeniable spiritual connection between ourselves and God. And as St Augustine of Hippo said "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."

May our souls find rest and hope in God. And may our spirits sing alongside God's angels as we meet. **Amen.**

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in the God who loves us:

We believe in God, the Father and Mother of us all, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

(Admission of Church Wardens will take place during the Zoom streaming of this service)

Worship Music *(online only)*

I heard the voice of Jesus say :

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74kyfROS4q8&ab_channel=AlexanderMcConnell

O thou who camest from above:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3UYybc7Xa0&ab_channel=drwestbury

Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5M6uaAWjkdo&ab_channel=MagdaleneShodavaram

Love divine all loves excelling:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGGcqhKShQ8&ab_channel=THENBA

As the deer pants for the water - Lucy Gibson attached

The Peace

God has made us one in Christ and has set his seal upon us as a pledge of what is to come. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

We are drawn to your feet in worship

Your creation facing its creator

Hearts laid bare by your light

Humbly asking for your mercy.

We come to you as a people in need
of assurance and forgiveness.

We come to you as a people in need
of healing and wholeness.

We come dependent upon your love.

Draw us close.

Enfold us in your arms.

Fill us with your Spirit
that we might reflect your light
within this hurting world.

We ask this through your dear Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.** *(Faithandwrship.com)*

We pray for all who have been hospitalised, and for those who care so diligently for them. For anguished health and hospital staff, emergency services and hospital chaplains.

For those who have had lifesaving and pain diminishing surgery postponed, for those with long Covid and chronic pain.

We pray for the safe, efficient and generous role out of the vaccine, and give thanks for scientists and biochemists for this hope.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for our schools and colleges, for staff, students, and families. For those feeling overwhelmed. Those who require additional support. Those whose mental health is strained.

For those in poverty, and those who seek to address it.

Those for struggling to find work, those who have lost jobs and businesses, and those in financial insecurity.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for our government and world leaders. May leaders in all spheres of life lead with integrity, justice, and a desire to serve the common good. Servants after God's own heart.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all who suffer in body, mind and spirit

Heal, hold and comfort them with your presence and be with those who tend and worry for them.

Give peace in grief, and welcome all those recently departed into your eternal kingdom where pain and tears are no more.

Lord hear us: **Lord graciously hear us.**

We take a moment to lift the prayers of our own hearts before God...

We commend ourselves and the whole of creation to your unfailing love. **Amen.**

Joining all our prayers together we say the prayer our saviour taught us:

**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 them that trespass against us.
And 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.**

Closing Hymn on Zoom – words will be displayed on screen.

Blessing

May Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill you with joy and peace.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Collection – Church Bank Details

Thank-you to those who financially support our churches. Please don't worry if your circumstances are such that this is not possible at this time, we all support the Church and its Mission in so many different ways.

Brinkley Church

Bank Account Number: 44335059 Sort code: 60 15 47

Cheques payable to: Brinkley PCC

and can be sent to Treasurer: Mrs P Bull. Tree Tops, High Street Brinkley CB8 0SE

Email: trish.bull50@btinternet.com

Burrough Green Church

Bank Account Number: 00225002 Sort code: 20-60-38

Cheques payable to: Burrough Green PCC

and can be sent to Treasurer: Tiffany Orgill. 11 Walnut Cottages, Borough Green CB8 9ND

Email: tiffany.dialo@btinternet.com

Carlton Church

Bank Account Number: 30238090 Sort code: 20-60-38

Cheques payable to: Parochial Church Council of Carlton St. Peters

and can be sent to Treasurer: Helen Coppen, Breydon, Acre Road, Carlton, CB8 9LF

Email: helencoppen@gmail.com

Dullingham Church

Bank Account Number: 40337684 Sort code: 20.60.38

Cheques payable to: St Mary's Dullingham PCC

and can be sent to Treasurer: Fiona Wharton. 14 Algar Drive, Dullingham, CB8 9XN

Email: fionamarywharton@gmail.com

Stetchworth Church

Bank Account Number : 80841595 Sort code: 20-60-38

Cheques payable to: Stetchworth PCC

and can be sent to Treasurer: Alastair France. 61 High Street Stetchworth, CB8 9TH

Email: afrance@jdpw.com

Westley Waterless Church

Bank Account Number : 40954934 Sort code: 20-60-38

Cheques Payable to: Westley Waterless PCC

and can be sent to Treasurer: Zara Napier. Gowan Cottage, Westley Waterless CB8 0RQ

Email: zaranapier@aol.com

With grateful thanks, Nikki and the PCC's