

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

www.stmagnus.org

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

You can find our Sunday worship here.

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/OuPn18G-SRM>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

All creation holds its breath.

The time is almost here.

The heavenly choir of angels waits for its cue to sing.

Excitement is all around us.

We prepare our hearts-The grace of God takes on human form.

Good news! Emmanuel, God-with-Us, comes to us.

We gather to make ready our hearts

As this season of sparkle and bright unfolds around us the welcome beauty of love is found, woven into the simplicity of every moment.

May love flow from our hearts with abundance filling every moment with the season's gifts of hope and peace and joy. May it be shared truly and deeply that all who encounter it be charged with its message and become, themselves, the agents of love. And may our children, who love without reckoning, teach us the truth of this most precious gift—we are nothing without each other. Let us live, then, in the blessing of love.
May Love light the world this Christmas.

Reading

Psalm 22; 1-10

My God, my God,
Why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far away, so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning? I cry all day, my God, but you never answer; I call all night long, and sleep deserts me. But you, Holy One—
you sit enthroned on the praises of Israel. Our ancestors put their trust in you; they trusted and you rescued them; they cried to you and were saved;
they trusted you and were never disappointed. Yet here I am, more worm than human, the scorn of humanity, an object of ridicule: all who see me mock me; they shake their heads and sneer, "You trust in God? Ha! Let God save you now! If God is your friend, let God rescue you!" Yet you drew me out of the womb; you nestled me in my mother's bosom; you cradled me in your lap from my birth; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Reflection

Life can feel like chaos. Life can feel formless, void. Life can be full of challenges. Life can feel so difficult. The Psalmist once wrote and Jesus remembered his words from the cross: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" There are times when the darkness crowds around us, and we wonder if we have been forsaken, forgotten, forever left alone.

We may have friends or family who we have seen or may be seeing today slipping into chaos and difficulty. Our hearts break in anguish at what they face. We may not feel we are up to the task of bringing them the support they need. We are not alone in those feelings.

As we near the shortest day of the year, when darkness envelopes the earth, we await the coming light and affirm that within the womb of darkness, light emerges, and growth occurs, often when we least expect it.

Sometimes, in the midst of grief, when we are in the depths of loss and depression, the light seems faraway, impossible to find again. Out of the depths, we cry and sometimes all we hear is our own voice.

And yet, 'in the darkness the eye begins to see,' so wrote American poet Theodore Roethke. At first, when darkness descends, we feel lost, as if walking through the woods on a moonless night. But, then we discover little lights in the dark wood - and our eyes adjusting to the dark, and glimmers of something in the distance. In the darkness, we discover light enough to find our way home.

As I get older, like most us I reminisce and am gaining insights into my own childhood. When I was a small boy, not unusually, I was afraid of the dark. Shadows loomed large and threatening, and in the darkness, I felt alone and when my imagination got the best of me, I ran to my parents' room seeking comfort under their covers.

Darkness often brings confusion, and in the confusion of our grief, we often think the pain will never end, yet like the Solstice the light will gradually grow brighter, though we will always grieve our losses.

Yet, in the darkness, there is hope. As a parent, like my parents, I've learned to provide night lights around the house. Night lights don't always take away the loneliness or the need for a reassuring touch, but they help us orient ourselves and find our way.

The scriptures tell us darkness has a light of its own, and that darkness isn't always negative. In dark soil, seeds germinate and push toward the light. In the darkness of the womb, a baby grows, and on the darkest night, the eye begins to see. We may discover new hope amid grief, new life despite the reality of death. On the darkest and longest nights of the year, Jesus' birth is celebrated. In the ancient world, people feared the winter nights: they worried that darkness would swallow the light, and the sun would be no more. What joy they felt when the days grew longer!

In the darkness of winter - in the darkness of our lives - we too need the reassurance that light will come - that we will find a way through our grief, our doubt, our confusion...At Christmas, and in the days beyond Solstice, we affirm that the light we need is already here, that a light shines within a lowly stable, and it changes everything: our fears of darkness are cast out and we can with the shepherds find our way to places of birth and beauty.

A star guides the magi from the East, and this year we need to let Christ's light guide us as well: we need to rise up despite the heaviness of grief and the challenges of our time, when leaders have lost their reason and traumatise the nation with their rants and hare-brained policies, and be ready for adventure, for Christ's light has come; despite our grief and anxiety, we are ultimately safe and give thanks for those we have loved; and a child is born to us and in us inviting us to affirm - "On the longest nights, the light of the world shines in us. In the midst of confusion, the light of the world guides our path. In uncertainty,

the light of the world gives us direction and bring us joy." Into our darkness comes the light of Christ, the eternal light, to illumine our lives and our souls, bringing hope and anticipation, confidence and wonder, that all which we had thought was lost finds new life in the love of God.

Prayer

In those days...

When darkness stalked the earth
When nations were at war
When people felt oppressed
When fear was a constant companion
When hearts were filled with longing

A decree went out...

And people complied or resisted
Responded with fear or compulsion
Were forced to be registered and recorded
Became united in their plight
or divided by their contempt

From Emperor Augustus...

The region's super power
Imposed and unelected
Revered and despised
Invoking terror or respect
Eliciting confidence or despair
Harbinger of ill to follow

All the world...

The high and the mighty
The poor and the lowly
The stranger and the neighbour
Every creed and culture
Minority and majority

Into this world

A world of hatred and division
A world of fear and contempt

A world of longing and of hoping
God intervened
Became flesh
And dwells with us
In those days
In these days
Hope, Peace and Light dwells among us.

Blessing

The waiting is soon, the longing great, the moment near,
the promise revealing, the baby quickening, the starlight gathering, but
not yet, not yet.
Let us go and whisper the hope of this story into the noise of the world
and come back, soon, for the incarnation is near.

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his
Spirit this day and always.