

NOTES: • Singalong & Nativity Sunday • Derek & Singalong Team to lead
 • Explorers/Baseline & Team nativity story • Dan to lead 2nd half & preach

PHIL/BAND TO PLAY

WELCOME: *Welcome everybody song & Ollie the Owl* **Derek**

INTRODUCTION: What's happening 1) (1st half we're all in together / 2nd half younger folk & their grown-ups will head over to the S Hall more singalong fun and crafts and games 2) When young folk are upfront on stage it'll just be audio that is broadcast 3) We'll light our peace, joy and HOPE advent candles later **Dan**

SONG 1: Mary had a baby (yes Lord) Mary had a baby (Yes my Lord) **Derek**
 Mary had a baby (yes Lord) The people came to worship him in Bethlehem

PRAYER SONG 2: May you find peace, hope, joy, love this Christmas **Rachel & Derek**

NATIVITY STORY

& FINISH WITH CHORUS: O come let us adore Him (x2) **Phil on Organ**

SONG 3: Angels song (Fischy song) **Rachel & the Baseline Band**

SONG 4: He shall reign forever more **Rachel & the Baseline Band**

Invite: 1) Carols by Candlelight tonight @7pm refreshments after
 2) Follow the Star – Christmas Eve 6pm @ Green 6:30pm @ café
 3) Christmas day all age celebration at 10:30pm (we'll get to enjoy Explorers telling of Christmas through their drawings and a musical montage
 4) Thank you – to all who help with our youth and children – week in and week out there's lots that goes on behind the scenes. God bless our children and youth team.
 5) After Away and the Manger and bubbles it's part 2 and younger folk will head through the S Hall

SONG 5 & Bubbles: Away in a manger

Young folk & grownups leave for South Hall

SONG 6: Angels from the realms of glory **CH4 324**

ADVENT CALL TO WORSHIP & LIGHTING 'HOPE' CANDLE (John 1:1-5 & 14) **Please say together...**

1¹In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God

2^{He was with God in the beginning}

3^{Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.}

4^{In him was life and that life was the light of all mankind.}

5^{The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it...}

14^{The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.}

**We have seen his glory the glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

REFLECTION: *The Universe doesn't love you* by Joshua Luke Smith (from Lectio 365)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mfr4aaVtSS0>

PRAY (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication)

& LORD'S PRAYER with British Sign Language

Lord, we come lifting our eyes from the canvas to You the Creator.

We come with our yearnings, complicated stories, and hopes and fears of the years.

We come to the God with birthmarks, and scars, the God of the poor.

We come saying thank for loving us, for coming for us and coming to save us.

I and we and the world needs saving.

Thank you for your living and dying. Thank you and sorry.

Thank you that we can rise with you because you did.

You are the God who is with us.

You are the God who is here.

Holy Spirit help us to open our eyes and hearts and closed doors to Jesus.

O come, O come Emmanuel – God with us.

For to us a child of hope is born. To us a son is given.

The prince of Peace forever more adored.

The wonderful counsellor – the great and Mighty Lord.

& LORD'S PRAYER with British Sign Language

SONG 7: The race that long in darkness pined (Isaiah 9:2-7 paraphrase) **CH4 290**
(To us a child of hope is born)

OFFERING PRAYER

BIBLE: Luke 2:22-35

MESSAGE: Yakhal /Hope

SONG 8: O little town of Bethlehem **CH4 304** (The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight)

PRAYER, BENEDICTION & OFFER OF PRAYER MINISTRY

PHIL/BAND TO PLAY

HOPE/YAKHAL

Today we are thinking a bit about hope. To help is a drawing of Simeon and Baby Jesus and a rope held in tension. We'll get to both shortly! To help us with our pondering. Here are some quotes and song lines on hope. A point if you can complete the quote or lyric. Bonus point is you know who said or sung it!...

1. *"While there's life, there's hope."* - Cicero
2. *"Hope is a waking dream."* - Aristotle
3. *"Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies".* Andy Dufresne to Red in the film The Shawshank Redemption
4. *"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."* - Martin Luther King, Jr.
5. *"To live without hope is to cease to live."* - Dostoevsky
6. *"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."* - Desmond Tutu
7. *Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free, How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?* - Edward Elgar
8. *Give me hope Jo-anna* by Eddie Grant (an anti-apartheid song in the 80s about Johannesburg, South Africa)
9. *We found love in a hopeless place* - Rihanna ft. Calvin Harris
10. *Now if you feel that you can't go on, Because all of your hope is gone...Darling, reach out...reach out for me - I'll be there, with a love that will shelter you...I'll be there, with a love that will see you through* - *Reach out I'll be there* by the Four Tops

In these quotes, thoughts, descriptions and images about hope some really interesting connections are being made. Hope is connected...

...to challenging circumstances and hardships changing

...hearts and attitudes changing

...to light and life

...with a person characterised by love, faithfulness and being with us!

In the Old Testament in ancient Hebrew, there are two main words used for hope.

The first is יָחַל yachal (yaw-chal') which means to wait, to expect.

The second word is קָוָה qavah (kaw-vaw') which means to hold in tension, like a cord or a rope being pulled and stretched. Do you ever feel the stretch and tension of waiting and hoping and praying? There is a tension when it comes to hoping and praying and waiting and trusting in a good God when circumstances are anything but. Have you ever felt the release of tension and relief when a hope is finally released? I think qavah and the accompanying word picture is a really honest and helpful one.

Good examples of how God's people in the Old Testament understood Hope (i.e. what it looks like, feels like and how it is expressed and to whom) are found throughout the Psalms. Let's take Psalm 130 as an example. Psalm 130 was most likely written by God's people while they were in exile in Babylon. They composed this Psalm and began singing this while they were conquered and captured, when circumstances were anything but good. Interestingly in the Psalm, they acknowledge that they need saved not just from the wicked oppression of the Babylonians, but they need saved and forgiven for their own sins. It is the song of those who know they are both sufferers and sinners.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; ² Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

³ If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

**⁵ I qavah/wait for the Lord, my whole being qavah/waits,
and in his word I put my yachal/hope.**

**⁶ I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.**

**⁷ Israel, put your yachal/hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.**

⁸ He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

In Psalm 39:7 hope comes into sharp focus.

But now, Lord, what do I look for/wait for/qavah for? My hope is in you. You are my yachal.

In the Old Testament God's people put their hope in God's faithfulness, His character and nature. As God had rescued and delivered, forgiven and redeemed in multiple temporal ways so they hoped and trusted that God would again do so in an ultimate and lasting way.

In today's passage we read that old Simeon had been hoping and praying and waiting and holding his hope in tension. God's people were not under Egyptian and Pharoah's rule and oppression. They were not under the brutal rule of Babylon and their King. God's people were under Roman and Caesar's rule and oppression. Circumstances were anything but good.

But in the midst of all that is going on there is hope. Our reading today is full of hope.

Hope in the character and nature of God.

Hope in God being able to change circumstances.

Hope in God being able to change hearts and attitudes.

Hope in Jesus being the light of the world.

Hope in Jesus being the fulfilment of God's promises.

Hope in Jesus being the glory of God.

Hope in God love and faithfulness and salvation being for all – Jew and Gentile.

Hope in God getting up close and personal, reaching out when we feel like we can't go on.

Hope that comes through God the Holy Spirit revealing who Jesus is.

This advent passage on hope follows on from the passage of the shepherds where the coming of peace and joy to all mankind is declared by the angels and connected with Jesus. The Jesus the Shepherds get to see lying in the manger in Bethlehem.

V20 ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. This morning the next 15 verses beginning in Luke chapter 2 verse 21. This is the word of God.

BIBLE: LUKE 2:21-35

²¹ On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'^[b]), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons'.^[c]

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss^[d] your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² **a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'**

³³ **The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'**

Here are 3 brief points.

- 1. Hope in Jesus is rooted in reality.**
- 2. Hope in Jesus offers us something better than romanticism and cynicism.**
- 3. Hope in Jesus is a living hope.**

1. Hope in Jesus is rooted in reality.

In verse 25 we're told that Simeon has been waiting, praying, hoping for the consolation of Israel. That would have included him singing Psalm 130 **out of the depths I cry to you** and Simeon saying he qavah-ed and yachal-ed God. Simeon knew that Israel (under Roman occupation) was in dire straits and needed God's intervention, help and comfort and mercy and justice. Simeon is also honest about Israel's suffering *and* sinfulness and his own. Simeon is aware that being a devout, law keeping, religious, temple going man is not enough. He needs salvation and to meet with the Saviour before he dies and meets his Maker...as do we all. It's quite the temporal and eternal reality check!

Simeon's hope in Jesus does not do down or dial down the challenges he and his people were facing and experiencing. In Jesus, God takes both our suffering and our sin seriously. God becoming human and walking in our shoes affirms our humanity in the most incredible way. God becoming human and suffering all the ways he did, shows us that He takes our suffering seriously. God becoming human and going on to die for us so we can be forgiven friends, addresses and deals with our sin in the most incredible way. He takes our suffering and sin seriously. We don't know from the text how much of this the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon, but He revealed enough that enabled Simeon to be real and to put his hope in Jesus.

2. Hope in Jesus offers us something better than romanticism and cynicism.

In our post-modern western world there tends to be two ways to look at the world – one is with and through a romantic lens, the other is in and through a cynical lens.

Romanticism goes something like this...*what a wonderful and beautiful world we live in. How wonderful people are! People are (by in large, with maybe a few exceptions) good, trustworthy, reliable and kind. I am a good person (any time I'm not, there are mitigating circumstances). I'm a nice person (well deep down even if that doesn't always come out or come across). Systems might be flawed but that's not the right way to think about people. Selfishness and self-centredness are not the human norm. Evil is...well best not to think about it. At a push, it can be explained psychologically. Best to think the best of people. Human rights are obvious, apparent, self obvious and should just happen. Things should work. And like the sign on the Modern Art Gallery says, 'Everything is going to be ok'. Yeah for life on earth!*

Cynicism goes something like this...*everything is broken - systems, institutions, governments, councils, people! Because everything is broken beyond repair it's not worth trying to change things. The world is brutal and people are not inherently good. People can't be trusted. Trusting leads to getting hurt. Hurt is to be avoided. Best to harden your heart to others and suffering. It's a dog-eat-dog world. Best to look out for number 1. Best to expect the worst in people then you won't be disappointed. When you see the worst in others its best to point it out as much as you can.*

I wonder if you recognise these traits in the news? In others? In yourself? I do.

The trouble with Romanticism is that it can't handle and doesn't know what to do with the evil that exists in the world and in the human heart. Sugar coating everything may make things appear nice and seem palatable, but fails to deal with what is under the surface of us complex humans.

The trouble with cynicism is that it sours and sucks the joy out of life. It ends up writing off humans and human nature and doing down beauty and awe and wonder.

You could say romanticism leaves you soft hearted and thin skinned.

You could say cynicism leaves you hard hearted and thin skinned.

Hope in Jesus offers another way to see the world.

A way to see the world that doesn't turn away from evil but confronts it.

It's a hope that encourages soft hearts and thick skin, so that we can be tender whilst not easily slighted. It's a hope enables to tread over sharp and rocky ground towards those in pain and walk with them.

It's a hope that allows us to say (as I heard one Christian say) *I've discovered that the evil in world is 1000 times worse that I thought, but God is a million times better.*

The Holy Spirit opened Simeon's eyes to see God's glory, and that the Saviour and salvation plan was not just for a select few but for the whole world.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.'

1. Hope in Jesus is rooted in reality.
2. Hope in Jesus offers us something better than romanticism and cynicism.
3. Hope in Jesus is a living hope.

In the New Testament the most common word for hope used in the original ancient Greek is ἐλπίς elpis which also means to wait, to be expectant, to trust.

You may remember this verse from our Colossians series. Chapter 1 verse 27.

²⁷ ...God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope/elpis of glory.

In 1 Peter 1:3 we read this wonderful hopeful verse - ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope/elpis through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3)

We can't be sure how much God the Holy Spirit revealed of this to Simeon. But he did reveal there would be blessing and pain in the process for Jesus and those who loved him and that Jesus's saving work would be worked out at the deepest of heart levels.

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Jesus is the light despite all the darkness. On the risen King's return, all the darkness will be chased away. And as Revelations 21 says ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' ^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." In the meantime we wait, and we wait with the tension.

When we feel like we can't go on, and all our hope is gone - we can reach out to the one who reaches out to us through the cross.

We can come to Jesus with all the tension we live with and feel because He is Emmanuel - God with us.

We can ask the Holy Spirit to reveal these truths and help us to see the glory and the goodness and the saving power of Jesus. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us to hear and take in God's promise spoken through the prophets (centuries before the 4 Tops) and spoken in person through Jesus *I'll be there, with a love that will shelter you...I'll be there, with a love that will see you through.* **PRAY**