

Welcome, we come before God in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Call to worship:

Grant us, O Lord, the will to accomplish all that pleases you; the strength to do all that you command and the reverence to respect all that you have made; for your own name's sake. Amen.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)

Read or sing these verses:

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come to us,
you are one with us,
Mary's Son;
cleansing our souls from all their sin,
pouring your love and goodness in;
Jesus, our love for you we sing,
living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come to us,
born as one of us,
Mary's Son;
led out to die on Calvary,
risen from death to set us free;
living Lord Jesus, help us see
you are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we would come to you,
live our lives for you,
Son of God.
All your commands we know are true;
your many gifts will make us new;
into our lives your power breaks through,
living Lord.

Patrick Appleford (b. 1925)

Let us pray:

O Lord, our living God, we praise and bless your holy name. We seek to live for you and in your image in the places we are. Thank you for your love and care for us. Accept our words of gratitude and praise, inadequate though they are, and we pray that you may see the true depth of our love for you as you search our hearts and our souls. We thank you for the gift of Jesus, your love made flesh, so you would be made known to us. We give thanks for your gift of the Holy Spirit that enables us to praise and worship you with our whole being. In Jesus name. AMEN

Our Confession:

Lord God, you have shown us such love, and stretched out your arms to draw us into your embrace.

Yet we so often fail to show that love within our lives, or recognise its source. Forgive our short-sightedness, for the times we've failed to see your love in the generosity of friend or stranger, the shoulder to cry on, willing ear to listen, a word of encouragement, holding our hand that extra mile. Forgive us for failing to notice how much you care for us....

In Christ we hear God's words of grace that our sins are forgiven. We are at peace with God and one another. AMEN

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
Now and for ever.
Amen.

ADDRESS

In the Bible, God is compared to a mother multiple times both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Think on these verses

In Deuteronomy 32:11-12 God described as a mother eagle

"Like the eagle that stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young, God spreads wings to catch you, and carries you on pinions."

In Hosea 11:3-4 God described as a mother: "Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I who took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them."

We see God take on the motherly role of teaching, cuddling, and nourishing when He says, "it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms ... and I bent down to them and fed them."

In Isaiah 49:15 God compared to a nursing mother: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.”

The psalmist also uses this metaphor of God as a breastfeeding mother in **Psalm 131:2 God as a Mother:** “But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.” The nursing mother who in this act provide comfort and solace.

As such, God again compares Himself to a mother **Isaiah 66:13 God as a comforting mother:** “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”

Jesus continues this metaphor in **Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34 when Jesus speaks of God as a Mother Hen** “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

God is not a physical being as we are, we find that difficult to understand. Jesus tells us ‘God is spirit’, we can find that difficult to understand. The way humanity reflects God is shown in Genesis 1:27 “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

We experience the fullness of God in the attributes of God. Those attributes WE separate into ‘male’ or ‘female’; into ‘motherly’ or ‘fatherly’, yet those terms have no purchase in the personhood of God. They are our concepts, our explanations. What God asks, I believe, is that whatever of those attributes we have within us that came as we were ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’, we are to use to show the God we love to others. We can all be ‘motherly’ and we can all be ‘fatherly’. We are all called to show the love of God in Christ to all God’s people.

Read or sing these verses:

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,
is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge --
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
in his arms he'll take and shield you,
you will find a solace there.

Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886)

Our Intercessions:

God of all hope we call on you today.
We pray for those who are living in fear:
Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other's reactions to them.
May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.
For those people who are worried about attending worship.
For those needing to make decisions in order to care for other
For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend.
Grant us your wisdom.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that
Nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.
Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you. AMEN

We say our own prayers for those we know and have care for, for our friends and
especially our families. AMEN

Read or sing these verses:

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name -- the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

*Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)
Based on the Magnificat*

Blessing:

God will come before us presenting gifts and will guard us with a hedge of protection.

God will shine the wholeness of his being toward us, giving us peace and he will give us comfort

God will lift up his face and look at us and in God we find we are whole and complete.

AMEN