

by loving God and each other. Jesus acted out the meaning of love to inspire us into a better, more meaningful life. This most loving and gracious of all men, taught us, healed us, shared his wisdom with us and in the end suffered the most appalling and humiliating death without protest. He did all this in the name of a God whom he regarded as a father who gave total meaning to his life, and he wanted us to share this meaning.

My appeal to us, in the darkness of this winter and of the world in which we live, is to seek the light of God's love. I do this by contemplating the vastness of God's creation: a 13.8-billion-year-old universe with as many stars as there are blades of grass on earth, I then think of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his belief that his God loved us not just as a species but as individuals. This gives meaning to my life and helps me through the dark and difficult times. I hope that he may do the same for you in the way that is most appropriate to the person whom you are. In the name of God. **Amen**

The response

Christ, the morning star (Wellspring)

Through Christ, the firstborn of all creation, **We pray for respect for the earth**

Through Christ, Prince of peace, **We pray for peace for earth's peoples**

Through Christ, King of love, **We pray for love in our lives**

Through Christ, Lord of the dance, **We pray for delight in the good**

Through Christ, divine healer, **We pray for forgiveness for past wrongs**

Silence for our personal confessions

Through Christ, Morning Star of a new year, **We pray for the grace to make a new start for ourselves and for our world.**

And may God bless us and keep us, today and each day. And until we meet again, may God hold us in the palm of his hand. **Amen**

Prayers for those known to us and for the world's problems

The Lord's Prayer

Dedication of offerings

The dismissal

HYMN: stf:330 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

A blessing as you journey into the new year (Lynda Wright)

May your eyes be opened to the wonder of the daily miracles around you and your sense of mystery be deepened. May you be aware of the light that shines in the darkness, and that the darkness can never put out. May you be blessed with companions on the journey, friends who will listen to you and encourage you with their presence. May you learn to live with what is unsolved in your heart, daring to face the questions and holding them until, one day, they find their answers. May you find the still, quiet place inside yourself where you can know and experience the peace that passes understanding. May love flow in you and through you to those who need your care. May you continue to dream dreams and to reach out into the future with a deeper understanding of God's way for you. **Amen**

Benediction (Ian Cowie)

The blessing of the One who was, who is, and who is to come be upon us all, redeeming our past, filling our present, lighting up our future. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Circuit Worship at Home sheet for 2nd Sunday of Christmas – 2nd January 2022
Theme: Darkness and light

The Preparation

Prayer of Approach

From the damp that lingers and fingers our flesh, **God, in your warmth, deliver us.**

From the mist that chides and hides our joy, **God, in your light, illumine us.**

From winter's sleep that chills and stills our strength, **God, in your morning, waken us.**

Hymn StF: 39 Angel voices, ever singing

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Always Emmanuel (John Harvey)

God, above time, above space, yet with us and in us in Christ, we who are creatures of time and space come to you with thankfulness. We give you thanks for the year that has passed.

We thank you for the many ways in which you have touched us, in moments of great happiness or in deep distress. You have been present in Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. **We thank you** for the people who matter to us, near and far, who have given themselves to us and through whom you have been present to us in their love. **We thank you** for your church, the community of faith in whose company we have journeyed, whose friendship we value, whose challenge we welcome, and whose wide boundaries are not defined by time, by space or by death.

In this new year, give us grace to leave behind our regrets and our failures and any sense of guilt Silence

Give us grace to let go of the past with gratitude, and to leave in your hands the future in faith **to live each moment in joyful discipleship, in the company of him who is always Emmanuel, God with us. Amen**

Prepared by Hugh McCredie

Introduction to the worship theme: Darkness and Light

Which do you prefer darkness or light? Why? Can you think of anything about darkness that is good?

The ministry of the word

First reading Jeremiah 31.10-14

Second reading Ephesians 1.3-14

Third reading John 1. 10-18

Hymn: StF: 346 Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;

Sermon

We have been thinking about darkness and light, so near to the longest night and the shortest day. Many world religions have a festival of light at this time of year. With physical darkness, we may also experience mental darkness. Doctors call it Seasonally Affective Disorder (SAD), mild depression due to the absence of natural daylight. Let me re-pose the question: Is darkness always a bad thing? It can be a time of growth: human growth in the darkness of the womb; vegetable growth in the darkness of the soil. Darkness can be a time of renewal and recreation: we need darkness for sleep. A useful tip is to avoid strong artificial lighting in the hour before going to bed. The Hebrews needed the darkness of the 40 wilderness years before they occupied the 'Promised Land', to transform them from a semi-pagan slave labor force into a God-fearing disciplined nation. At a later date they needed the dark experience of 50 years captivity in Babylon to re-establish the values of righteousness and justice that they had lost. Jesus, himself, had his 40 days wilderness experience to prepare him for his three-year ministry.

Even darkness of depression may have a purpose. It is suggested that non-clinical depression is a state into which human beings retreat when we have something major to sort out which our current

way of thinking cannot handle. It seems, also, that most people come out of the darkness of depression much stronger than when they went into it.

Most of us will be able to pinpoint both light and dark moments. Light moments when something really nice has happened; dark moments when things were going wrong, often from something for which we were deeply ashamed. An early 20th century writer developed the idea that all of us have light and dark sides, which he called our dominant and shadow functions. In order to survive, all of us have to do two things: take in what's going on around us and then decide what to do about it. Some people prefer the taking things in stage, whilst others prefer deciding. There are also two opposite ways to achieve each task of taking in and deciding. With taking things in, some people are good at absorbing the detail whilst others are good at seeing the big picture. As for deciding, some people rely on logic and decide with the head. Others will rely on how they feel about something, deciding with the heart. Statistically, most women decide by feeling, whilst most men go by logic.

So, we have detail and big-picture ways of taking things in and feeling and logic for ways of deciding. With both taking things in and deciding, we will come to prefer one way over the other. Also, we will become particularly strong at one of the four tasks or functions - detailing, big-picturing, feeling and logicking. However, this is only achieved at the cost of neglecting the opposite function which has been called our shadow or dark side. Typically, men whose logic has been so well developed have not learned to handle emotions. Consequently, they fail to take account of others' feelings when they make decisions and bottle-up emotions so that they creep up and bite them. This can lead to occasional outbursts of anger when we say things that we will regret. I know all this because I am such a person.

It is suggested that we should spend the first half of our lives developing what comes naturally and the second developing what do not. I did a two-year part-time course in counselling skills where we learned about handling feelings. My wife said that I was a better person at the end of it. That was 30 years ago, and I have not asked her recently!

These are just human thoughts on how to handle our dark side. Our gospel reading told us that Jesus was light to a dark world. Just what did or does this mean? I believe that Jesus came to show us a more enlightened way to live.

Most of us accept that human beings are the product of evolution by the survival of the fittest. Our species came into being because it won the competition. Regrettably, this left humanity as an essentially selfish species. Our natural state is to get as much as we can of everything that is going. This may help ensure our survival, but it does not necessarily lead to happiness. If you look at those who have the most, can you conclude that they are the happiest?

Unlike other animals, we don't have to behave instinctively. We have the capacity to think about the rightness of what we are doing. Some would argue that this capacity is the bit of us made in God's image. Others have argued that what human beings need above all in their lives is not possessions but meaning. Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist, told us that what gave him and others the will to survive the horrors of Nazi concentration camps was the sense of meaning in their lives. This contrasted with the majority, who had no such compelling meaning, simply giving up the struggle and accepting the inevitability of death.

Jesus came into the world to show us a better, enlightened way to live our lives. Above all, he preached a gospel of love: love of God for humankind and the need for humans to respond