



***A CELTIC THEMED EVENING SERVICE LITURGY***

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***Introductory Music***

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made

**And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters<sup>1</sup>.**

(John 1:1-3, Genesis 1:2)

O Lord, our Lord How majestic is your name in all the earth

**You have set your glory above the heavens.**

And from the lips of children praise O Lord, our Lord

**How majestic is your name in all the earth.**

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<sup>1</sup> All in bold to be said by congregation or 2<sup>nd</sup> voice

## ***CONFESSION***

Creative God, breath of all life  
Through whom all things  
are created and sustained;  
all sons and daughters  
flocks and herds,  
all birds of the air  
and fish of the sea

You walked this earth  
as child and Creator  
You touched the soil  
quenched your thirst  
embraced this world  
brought life and light  
love and laughter  
into dark and death-filled lives

## ***CONFESSION 2***

Creative God, breath of all life  
Through whom all things  
are created and sustained  
We bring to you our sacrifice  
of a contrite and willing heart

**Forgive us Lord for not doing what we should have done**

**Forgive us Lord for the hurt we have caused for our insensitivities and lack of care**

**Forgive us Lord for the destruction we have caused through our failure to care for the world**

## **READING**

## **VOICE 3**

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the East, and from the West I will gather you; I will say to the North, 'Give them up', and to the South, 'Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth - everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.'

Isaiah 43.5-7

For God so loved the world that He gave the only begotten Son, so that everyone believing in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life.

John 3:16

## **HYMN**

### ***ST PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE***

[Breastplate 1](#)

[Breastplate 2](#)

1 I bind unto myself today  
the strong name of the Trinity  
by invocation of the same,  
the Three in One and One in Three.

2 I bind this day to me forever,  
by power of faith, Christ's incarnation,  
his baptism in the Jordan river,  
his death on cross for my salvation,  
his bursting from the spiced tomb,  
his riding up the heavenly way,  
his coming at the day of doom,  
I bind unto myself today.

## ***HYMN 2***

3 I bind unto myself today  
the virtues of the starlit heaven,  
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,  
the whiteness of the moon at even,  
the flashing of the lightning free,  
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,  
the stable earth, the deep salt sea  
around the old eternal rocks.

4 I bind unto myself today  
the power of God to hold and lead,  
God's eye to watch, God's might to stay,  
God's ear to hearken to my need,  
the wisdom of my God to teach,  
God's hand to guide, God's shield to ward,  
the word of God to give me speech,  
God's heavenly host to be my guard.

### **HYMN 3**

5 Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

6 I bind unto myself the name,  
the strong name of the Trinity  
by invocation of the same,  
the Three in One and One in Three,  
of whom all nature has creation,  
eternal Father, Spirit, Word.  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation;  
salvation is of Christ the Lord!

*Source: Glory to God: the Presbyterian Hymnal*



## **REFLECTION**

- When I started to put together material for the Sibyls Purley Chase Weekend on the 24<sup>th</sup>. to the 26<sup>th</sup>. September this year (2021), I typed the keywords, Celtic, Christianity and transsexuality into my internet browser and found almost nothing. Tacitus however wrote: *“Among these last is shown a grove of immemorial sanctity. A priest in female attire has the charge of it. But the deities are described in Roman language as Castor and Pollux. Such, indeed, are the attributes of the divinity, the name being Alcis”*.
- Attitudes to these gender transformations did not seem to be of particular concern. Although Celtic women generally wore long *“bog dresses”* and men wore *“trews”*, dress could be interchangeable. In some sources, Druid priests are said to wear voluminous garments. However, it is more the known close interaction with other European cultures which leads to an impression that Druid priests cross dressed.
- In many traditions such people could be given high status. In this gender diverse role, they could belong to the shamanic traditions which transcend gender, and through the powers that this gave, bring greater healing to the world.

- There are few stories about gender change, and nothing to match the severe threats of gender transformation made by Middle Eastern Goddess cults made against males who could not sexually perform, or who offended the cults.
- One story in the Welsh Mabinogion describes two brothers who are turned first into deer, then into boar, then into wolves then back into humans. In each case, one of the boys is made a male of the species and the other becomes a female: then they then have children together.
- Gender does not appear to be an issue, neither does there appear to be any direct teaching on the subject of homosexuality and Christianity by any Celtic writer or saint, and there is nothing akin to homosexuality as people inside or outside the LGBT+ community describe it today.
- What there is however is a much greater equality between the sexes in the Celtic cultures, and the condemnation of sexual abuse.

- So, what view did the ancient Celtic Christian have of homosexuality? Little or no discussion about this is found, but that is not because they did not think of it, for condemnations of sexual abuse exist in the monastic penitential texts. The penalties for same-sex abuse and heterosexual abuse are broadly comparable to each other. There is also nothing in the teaching of Jesus which condemns loving same-sex acts.
- The Celtic Churches only had the Vulgate, Jerome's Latin translation of the bible. Jerome translates the passage, which some modern bibles identify as condemning homosexuality, by using the Latin words "*masculorum concubitoribus*." This implies male on male concubinage or pimping, involving a dominant male penetrating a subservient male. That interpretation represented the culture in Jerome's day... and also in the Greco-Roman and the Jewish cultures of Jesus' own time.
- In the Celtic Church and tradition, homosexual behaviour, same-sex attraction, and gender transformations were things that happened, but they do not seem to have been issues of concern. And none of these went against the scriptures they read.

- Significantly something similar seems to have happened in the Roman Church during the first millennium, where same-sex attractions could be expressed, but same-sex intercourse was violently condemned. To be penetrated during same-sex intercourse in any enslaving and grossly socially and gender unequal society, is an “*intrinsically disordered*” act, and the abuse of power gave permission for the abuse of sex.
- It is sometimes forgotten that from the outset Christianity spread East into a much more gender-equal Zoroastrian culture as well as into the Roman Empire, where gross discrimination took place. That difference had a profound impact on what has occurred.
- The Nestorian conflict was one of the major conflicts in the Church. It centred on whether the Virgin Mary should be called “*The Mother of God*” or the “*Mother of Christ*”. The Roman, or Western Church, insisted on the former. Nestorius and the Church of the East on the latter. We need not go too deeply into theology, but there was another important difference. In both cases women were required to atone for the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden. In the Western Church women’s lives had to be lived in penance for the fall: therefore, full atonement could only be achieved after a woman had died. In the Church of the East that atonement had already been made when “*Mary said yes*” to bearing the Christ Child. So, in the Church of the East, unlike in the Western Church, both men and women had full equality

- That same type of gender equality existed in the Irish Christian Church.
- Women like Brigid in Ireland, Aebbe in Scotland, and Hilda in Northumberland were leaders of mixed monasteries, where men and women lived and worked in equal co-operation.
- They also exercised authority over ordained clergy who worked alongside them.
- Brigid founded a double monastery at Kildare in Ireland and may have been consecrated as a bishop. Their counsel was also welcomed and expected at the court of kings.
- The Brehon Law observed in these cultures was a system well ahead of its time. It emphasised gender and social equality. It endorsed democracy
- Women were entitled to enter all the same professions as men; they could be Druids, poets, physicians, lawgivers, teachers, warriors, leaders, even Queens.
- The three major Saints Patrick, Brigid and Colmcille were given equal status and given equal recognition of the work they carried out throughout their lives.

- In the fifth century, St Patrick distilled these laws down to five volumes, removing and discarding those which did not fit with Christian doctrine
- Thus, Christianity in Ireland developed on the basis of equality of the sexes in broadly the same way as that of the Church of the East
- In Galatians 3:28, Paul said *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”*.
- When we consider Celtic Christianity, we must consider a Christianity where true gender equality was sought. There was no denigration of gender transformation and sexual acts were condemned because of the abuses, not because of the acts.
- That was not the case with the Roman Church
- Up to about the end of the first millennium both the Roman and the Celtic Churches accepted same-sex relationships given in love, but Rome condemned all male same-sex intercourse for the abuses of power and sex. That changed when the Roman Church adopted Aquinas’ teaching which liberalised sexual expressions within marriage, but condemned all sexual relationships outside marriage exclusively as generators of lust and inappropriate acts

- This provides the framework for the present-day teaching of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic church.
- *“Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, Tradition has always declared that "Homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved”.*
- By claiming divine authority all religions can be generators of preoccupations as well as truths. The Roman Church developed a preoccupation with sexuality. The Church of the East developed a preoccupation with asceticism, The Thomas Christians developed a preoccupation with status and the caste system in India.
- By returning to the inclusive Gospel of Christian Love, we can truly welcome all people, of all gender identities and sexualities into the fellowship of Christ.
- That is a discussion we will follow up at Purley Chase.

## ***PRAYERS***

### *WONDER*

Beneath the surface of your story  
is an inescapable fact  
You entered this world  
as vulnerable as any one of us  
in order to nail that vulnerability to the cross.  
Our fears, our insecurities and our sins  
all that can separate us from God  
exchanged by your Grace for Love.  
We cannot comprehend the reasoning  
only marvel that Salvation comes to us  
through a baby born in a stable,  
who reaches out to a world in need.



## ***PRAYERS 2***

### ***TRANSFORMATION***

### ***VOICE 2***

**There is a transformation that takes place  
within the warmth of your embrace  
That certain knowledge that you are  
refuge, shelter, fortress and stronghold  
against which no army can succeed  
That you are Brother, Sister, Mother, Father  
the love that knows no bounds  
That you are God  
And I am lost outside of your arms**

## **PRAYERS 3**

## **VOICE 3**

### *TIMES*

Lord of the morning  
of dawn chorus  
rising sun  
mist on water

Lord of the noontime  
of chattering voices  
laughter and fun  
sparkling water  
everyone

Lord of the evening  
of quiet breeze  
setting sun  
gentle waters  
day that's done

### ***HYMN***

*Lord of all Hopefulness*

## *LORD OF ALL HOPEFULNESS*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-D\\_aT8CXyc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-D_aT8CXyc)

1 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,  
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,  
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

2 Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,  
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,  
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,  
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

## ***HYMN 2***

3 Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,  
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,  
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,  
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4 Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,  
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,  
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,  
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

## ***INTECESSIONS***

Circle us, Lord

Circle us with the light of your presence, bright within this dark world  
Enable us to be overcomers of fear and temptation  
Enable us to be victors over sin and despair  
Enable us to become that which you would desire

*Personal prayers, silent or aloud*

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

**Circle us Lord with the light of your presence**

## ***INTERCESSIONS 1***

Circle us, Lord

Circle us all with your joys of inclusion

Share to all people your joy and your love

Share your delight in the richness of gender

Share that in love we all are as one

Enable us to bring to all people, regardless of race, sex, or gender your full inclusion in  
God's Love

*Personal prayers, silent or aloud*

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

**Circle us Lord with the light of your presence**

## ***INTERCESSIONS 2***

Circle us, Lord

Circle our family within the shelter of your outstretched arms  
Protect them in each moment of their daily lives  
Protect them in the decisions that they face  
Protect their homes and relationships

*Personal prayers, silent or aloud*

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

**Circle us Lord with the light of your presence**

## ***INTERCESSIONS 3***

Circle us, Lord

Circle all people with Your love and hope  
Create a desire to listen to the Gospel message  
Create a willingness to understand and respond  
Create a need to reach out to the Christ Child

*Personal prayers, silent or aloud*

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

**Circle us Lord with the light of your presence**



## ***INTERCESSIONS 4***

Circle us, Lord

Circle this world with the joy of your Salvation  
Where there is sickness and disease bring healing  
Where there is hunger and despair bring hope  
Where there is torture and oppression bring release

*Personal prayers, silent or aloud*

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

**Circle us Lord with the light of your presence**

## **SHARING**

Form a (virtual if necessary) circle, holding out or joining hands<sup>2</sup>

***Almighty God,  
My protection be  
Encircling round me.  
Let evil be quelled  
That grace may abound  
So, in me and each other  
God's Peace may be found***



(You may then share the Peace with each other as you wish)

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<sup>2</sup> The Celtic Church developed a special type of protection prayer, the Caim Prayer or Circle Prayer, it is where we get the word "Calm" from as praying this prayer would banish the storm and create calm. It was a way to surround oneself with God's protection and blessing and remove any evil. It was often prayed in by 'drawing' a circle around oneself as you prayed, at every 90 degree, turn. This is an example of a Celtic circle Prayer:

## ***LORDS PRAYER***

**Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother,  
Holy and blessed is your true name.  
We pray for your reign of peace to come,  
We pray that your good will be done,  
Let heaven and earth become one.  
Give us this day the bread we need,  
Give it to those who have none.  
Let forgiveness flow like a river between us,  
From each one to each one.  
Lead us to holy innocence  
Beyond the evil of our days —  
Come swiftly Mother, Father, come.  
For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy:  
Forever your name is All in One.**

Parker J. Palmer

## **BLESSING**

May God the Father, bless us;  
may Christ take care of us;  
the Holy Ghost enlighten us all the days of our life.  
The Lord be our defender and keeper of body and soul,  
both now and for ever, to the ages of ages.

Æthelwold c 908-984

[Closing Music: Irish Blessing](#)

*(move to next slide)*



## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

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