

Worship Material
Moving outwards
Material from Roots Bible Study
Sunday 25th January

Begin with an opening prayer

God of light,
bringing joy and freedom to all nations.
Gather us to yourself,
call us to the light of your presence
and help us to shine outwards so that others can see your light.

Amen.

Read Isaiah 9:1-4

Bible notes

This passage from early in Isaiah is in many ways the template for all the texts in Isaiah commonly known as 'servant songs' (covered in previous weeks). The central character of the oracle is God (as is clear from verse 3). He is the one who both is, and who shines the great light that is the light of freedom from oppression and fear. What God does for his people here is what the servant is tasked with later in the book.

This text, with the additional three verses, is a central Christmas reading where the child of verse 6 is directly associated with Jesus. Thus, its association with Epiphany (and the coming of the light) is entirely understandable and appropriate. Notice that the text also makes reference to Galilee of the nations (v.1), picking up the idea that this region of Israel had always had a mixed population.

The darkness the prophet sees engulfing this region is that of the Assyrian invasion that all but wipes the northern kingdom off the map (see 2 Kings 17). But the people of verse 2 are not them. They are the citizens of the southern kingdom, also threatened with Assyrian invasion. Their gloom will be replaced by the light of God's presence. Indeed, the tenses here suggest that this has already happened although it lies some way in the future.

The freedom the prophet sees here is not only associated with the light of God but with celebration – the joy experienced when a harvest is abundant or

when soldiers return victorious with plunder to share. But the joy is mainly associated with being liberated from the yoke of oppression.

The experience of liberation proclaimed by the prophet is of the same order as the victory over Midian under Gideon, which is recounted in Judges 6–8. This is good news indeed – hence the tone of the passage – even though we know it is only temporary because after Assyria is dispatched Babylon looms.

Prayer

Fearless God, how wonderful is your presence with us,
as you move us outwards –
from sorrow to joy: **day by day**;
from challenge to opportunity: **day by day**;
from darkness to light: **day by day**;
from oppression to freedom: **day by day**;
from gloom to glory: **day by day**;
from fear to fulfilment: **day by day**.
Through the power of your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

A prayer to conclude

God of light,
keep us faithful as light-bearers.
Help us to keep our focus on you and then outwards to others.
Be with us as we move outwards beyond our comfort zone.
Help us, like the fishermen, to leave behind the familiar and safe
and move into your light with freedom and joy.
Amen.