

St Thomas Methodist Church, Exeter

January + February 2026
(Epiphany – Transfiguration)

Weekly Worship Resources

11 January – Hope refreshed

Isaiah prophesies to those in exile about God's chosen servant, who will bring justice, light and freedom from captivity to the nations.

We explore the hope that God gave to all people in his Son, Jesus, whose baptism we mark today, and how we might share God's hope with those who are in desperate need of it.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Baptism of the Lord Year A

Isaiah 42.1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10.34-43; Matthew 3.13-17

Isaiah 42:1-9 [NIV]

The Servant of the Lord

42 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

²He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

⁵This is what God the Lord says – the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ⁶“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷to open eyes that are blind, to

free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

⁸“I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. ⁹See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”



Thought for the week

If you were an advertiser working on a campaign focused on the word ‘refreshed’, what image or images would you use? A drink? A deodorant or soap? Running water? Or something else?

Now, for a possibly harder challenge, what image would you use for the word ‘hope’?

Today’s theme is ‘hope refreshed’. On the surface this theme sounds lovely – positive, uplifting and encouraging – but when we look at the theme through the times and lens of the exiled Israelites, we may approach this theme in a slightly different way.

Imagine working for an advertising agency back in the time of the exiled Israelites. Your brief is to come up with a campaign to bring the theme 'hope refreshed' to the Israelites.

Who is the audience? The Israelites. They have been living in exile, in Babylon, for decades – a time that would have been physically, emotionally and spiritually difficult. They are a defeated and disillusioned group, far from home, and lacking in hope.

What is the aim of campaign? To bring hope and encouragement to the Israelites, and to instil confidence in them, so that they will be the people God wants them to be.

What is the brief? The campaign can't be too upbeat because there's lots of trauma and suffering. And it can't be too gentle or informal because the Israelites need a push towards action.

This 'hope refreshed' campaign seems almost impossible.

Thankfully, God can do the impossible!

In Isaiah 42, God speaks to the Israelites with the perfect blend of hope, care, encouragement and action. God brings the theme 'hope refreshed' to life.

How does God do this? God names them. God reminds the Israelites of who they are – God's chosen, in whom God delights. The people whom God has taken by the hand and kept close. They are also named God's servant – a gentle reminder about who God wants them to be.

God reminds them of who God is – the One who created the heavens and the earth, the One who gives breath and spirit to everyone. The Lord.

God calls them. He calls the Israelites to bring forth justice to the nations, to be a covenant to the people, and to be a light to the nations.

And God gives a vision for what is to come. Verse 9 says, 'See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.'

Hope refreshed for a disillusioned people.

Hope refreshed not just for the exiled Israelites but for all people, as we know that these words are supremely fulfilled in Jesus.

What images now spring to mind when you think of the words 'hope' and 'refreshed'?

Let's continue reflecting on how God brought 'hope refreshed' to the Israelites, and how God continues to bring hope for all people.

A prayer of adoration

God of justice and resilience, we give you thanks for calling us by name, to shed your light where there is darkness, to lead others to your Son, our Saviour, to be open to the empowering hope of your Holy Spirit.

May we never grow weary of praising you but serve you with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength, today and always.
Amen

18 January – Revealing the hidden

In this second 'servant song', we hear how God's servant was chosen by God before birth, then hidden and prepared for the special mission of not only restoring God's people but also being a light to all nations.

As we reflect on the readings and theme, we also reflect on our own lives. What might be currently hidden, and what is ready to be revealed so that people can see more of who God is?

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Epiphany 2 Year A

Isaiah 49.1-7; Psalm 40; 1 Corinthians 1.1-9; John 1.29-42

Isaiah 49:1-7 [NIV]

The Servant of the Lord

49 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.

²He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.

³He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendour."

⁴But I said, "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God."

⁵And now the Lord says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength – ⁶he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

⁷This is what the Lord says – the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel – to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."



Thought for the week

Over the last decade it has become popular to ‘reveal’ things, perhaps because social media makes the big reveal even bigger. Baby gender reveals have taken off in popularity with lots of special and often funny reveals sharing the gender of unborn babies. Many TV shows specialise in house and body makeovers – a journey of transformation that culminates in a big reveal showing the drastic changes that have been made.

What these reveals all have in common is that the thing that is to be revealed is always kept hidden for a time. We might be shown glimpses of the transformation and the change, but we are never shown the finished result until the parents/producers/builders are ready for the reveal.

Being hidden is an important part of the revealing process. When things are hidden, changes and preparations can be made in a safe environment. Babies form and grow while hidden in their mother’s womb. Renovated houses are stripped back, torn apart, and safely rebuilt hidden from the public eye. There’s lots of work required. It’s tiring. But the end results are often amazing.

In Isaiah 49, we are given an example of what it means to be hidden in God, in preparation for a big reveal. Israel had been living in exile and

during this time they had been 'hidden' in God's embrace. The reading says, 'In the shadow of his (God) hand he hid me' and 'In his quiver he hid me away'. God had been protecting the Israelites. God had been refining them. God had been actively preparing them for what was to come. Just like a baby in a mother's womb, or a house under construction, the Israelites had been hidden, in preparation for a big reveal.

It would have been easy for the Israelites to have stayed hidden. They were a defeated and disillusioned nation, and the people didn't feel like they had the strength to do what they were called to do as can be seen in verse 4: 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity'.

But God knew that they were ready to be restored and to live up to their calling. God had prepared them and it was time for the Israelites to be revealed – to be a light to the nations and to share God's salvation to the ends of the earth. The Israelites couldn't remain hidden longer. It was time for action.

During this season of Epiphany, we reflect on Jesus being revealed to us. In this reading, although it is delivered to the Israelites, we also hear of the one to come – Jesus, the light of the world who fulfilled God's ultimate plan of salvation that reaches all people. Just like the Israelites, it would have been easy for Jesus to have remained safely hidden with God, but that was never God's plan. God came to earth and was revealed to us in flesh as Jesus – the greatest reveal ever!

What about us? As we consider the Israelites and Jesus' calling, let's consider what our calling might be and what we are doing with that calling. Are we hidden away? Are we being prepared for a big reveal? Or are we revealing who we are and God's calling in our lives so that people in our communities, and all around the world, may come to know God?

A prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness

Merciful God, when we start to complain that we have laboured in vain: please forgive us.

When we fail to see what our purpose could be: please forgive us.

When nothing goes right and we turn from your light: please forgive us.

When faith slips away and we're reluctant to pray: please forgive us.

God of all that has been and all that is to be, your forgiveness and grace save us from shame and discouragement.

Your healing light and understanding save us from sinking into darkness, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus give us purpose, meaning and life everlasting. Amen

25 January – Moving outwards

Isaiah proclaims light and freedom for those in the region of Israel – the Galilee of the nations. We hear again the well-known words, often heard at Christmas, about light dawning on those who have been walking in darkness. The coming of the servant means that their oppression is over and joy abounds.

This week, we will move outwards beyond the Christmas associations of the Isaiah passage and see our calling mirrored in that of the first disciples.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Epiphany 3 Year A

Isaiah 9.1-4; Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 1.10-18; Matthew 4.12-23

Isaiah 9:1-4 [NIV]

9 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan –

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that
burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their
oppressor.

Thought for the week

'But we've just had Christmas!' I hear you cry. We are not even out of January yet and already we are hearing those words we may have heard so often at Christmas, during Carol services or in a candlelit church. The poetic words conjure up so easily the crib scene.

That picture is of course perfect if we extend the passage to include verse 6 and beyond where we hear of a child being born for us. So it is that association of Jesus as the child in the manger, the light of the world that immediately comes to mind – and that is not wrong. However, what we know about the darkness that Isaiah is writing about goes far beyond the passive darkness of a December evening. The darkness experienced by the people of Israel is that of war, invasion and destruction. It is the darkness of violence and oppression and enduring suffering. Into that context of darkness the light has come.

This takes our understanding far beyond the gentle coming of a child in a manger to the glorious liberating victory of a saving God. Of course, this is what the coming of Jesus is – God coming in victory to the world with a powerful message of salvation. However, we need to move outward and beyond our cosy hearing of this passage to consider this wider context, and really imagine ourselves into this deep darkness to fully appreciate the coming of the light.

In our cosy, comfortable Christmas scene, we are also probably picturing our nearest and dearest standing around holding candles to hear of this coming light. However, again, we must be challenged to recognise that this is also a potentially uncomfortable message – that God's salvation is moving outward, beyond the people we would

automatically expect, those already called and gathered as God's people, to encompass all people and all nations.

So let us hear these words and allow them to make us feel uncomfortable – to be challenged to move outwards beyond our familiar understanding in a Christmas context. Let us hear God coming with light and freedom into a context where there has been persecution, tyranny and strife. Let us hear God's light moving outwards to be for all nations. Let us be part of helping others to hear those words afresh and to move outwards to help share that light with others.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

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

01 February – What does God require?

The passage from Micah implores the people to do what God requires after rebuking how they have lived in the past. God presents his case against the people, reminding them of his faithfulness to them and that he does not require sacrifices or burnt offerings, but just and loving actions.

Today's readings may be a culture shock because, unlike the people of Micah's time, we don't envisage bringing livestock or groceries as offerings to worship. In contrast, the Beatitudes in Matthew explore what we can bring in our behaviour and interactions. Today, we're focusing on the why and what of offerings in our Christian lives.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Epiphany 4 Year A

Micah 6.1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1.18-31; Matthew 5.1-12

Micah 6:1-8 [NIV]

The Lord's Case Against Israel

6 Listen to what the Lord says: “Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.

²“Hear, you mountains, the Lord’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.

³“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. ⁴I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.

⁵My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.”

⁶With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

⁷Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.



Thought for the week: What does being just, being kind and being humble look like?

Imagine two siblings and a difficult old mother who is now in a care home. One sibling is living just around the corner from her; the other is some distance away. The nearby sibling is visiting almost every day, doing bits of shopping, and listening to their mother's worries and grumbles. The distant sibling announces a visit next week. Then, the day before they are due to arrive they suddenly announce they are not coming as they have to go abroad for work. As an attempt to try and make up for this, the distant sibling sends huge bunches of flowers and boxes of chocolates for both their mum and their sibling. How will the exasperated caring sibling and the disappointed mother react when these arrive? Will the gifts do any good, make amends?

The sibling who is nearby and caring for their mother possibly feels the keenness of injustice. It feels unfair that they are burdened by such a weight of responsibility and the distant sibling doesn't take their fair share. The mother doesn't like being a burden on the nearer sibling.

In addition to this, both mother and the nearby sibling want to be shown some kindness, upfront and personal, by a visit. The token of sending flowers and chocolates seems superficial and not a truthful loving kindness. The reality is that both mother and the other sibling need a visit and an acknowledgement of their struggle.

Finally, both would like to feel that failings have been acknowledged by the absent sibling, that they now have a deepening awareness of the situation and agree that they have fallen short of what was needed. If the distant sibling could show a bit of humility rather than an over-the-top gesture, what a difference that might make.

These days we don't offer placatory gifts of fruit and flowers and livestock to our God as the people of the ancient world did. But how often are we guilty, like the sibling living at a distance, of using customary gestures, the flowers adorning the front of the church, the well-chosen hymns, the good quality coffee afterwards, to hide from

our lack of attention to the things God really wants – a determined quest for justice in society, real kindness to our fellow worshippers and the wider community and a recognition – through humility – that we can never do enough. In our relationship with God, can we avoid the mistake of the distant sibling who gave a grand gesture but not the justice, kindness and humility that was required? God calls us to walk alongside and, like the mother, wants presence, not presents!

A gathering prayer

God, you call us to walk with you in justice, in kindness, in humility. Help us to see this is what you require, to leave behind all other expectations and be free to walk into the future you want for us as the people of God. Amen

08 February – Standing up for justice

The opening of this chapter of Isaiah begins with a reminder of what is at the heart of true worship and then proclaims a call to stand up for justice and equality.

Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, echoes this appeal for genuine, righteous ways of living. Coupling these passages together reminds us that Jesus' bid to be salt and light was not new teaching, but a reminder to understand the message of the prophets. This week we explore the ongoing need for us to stand up for justice.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Epiphany 5 Year A

Isaiah 58.1-9a; Psalm 112; 1 Corinthians 2.1-12,(13-16); Matthew 5.13-20

Isaiah 58:1-9a [NIV]

True Fasting

58 “Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

²For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my

ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

³‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.

⁴Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

⁵Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

⁶“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

⁷Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

⁹Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.



Thought for the week: Standing up for justice

In Jesus' time, and now, there are multiple uses for various types of salt. The word 'salt' covers a huge range of minerals, each with its own beneficial properties. While salt in food has taken a downturn in medical opinion, the food industry still values its use in extending the life and improving the flavour of processed foods. Consumption of food with added salt remains popular, alongside our understanding that 'take it with a pinch of salt' means that a little something needs to be added to make a fact – or a chip – more digestible.

Matthew 5:13 [NIV]

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

This well-known verse in Matthew's Gospel, however, seems to point to a wider teaching that is more about how we live than what we eat. The properties of salt to heal, flavour and preserve had long been known. But the sodium chloride (table salt) used for these purposes would hardly lie around long enough to lose its saltiness nor would it logically be trampled. This 'threat' points rather to the use in agriculture of sea salt. This would have been sprinkled onto manure heaps to encourage the process of breaking down the compost and improving the growing medium. It was salt for the earth.

With this connotation, Jesus is not suggesting we are 'only fit for composting' or 'to be thrown on the dung heap'! Rather, he is urging us to be the essence of a life-giving, growing medium that will bring growth and abundance because we are part of the process, in which our response to God encompasses all the challenges of life, not being just a few grains of justice scattered around as an afterthought.

And there's nothing wrong with compost! The Bible is full of examples of the lowliest beings and situations being used for the worthiest and noblest causes. Whoever we are, we can nurture growth, be as one with the purpose of God and bring justice to the oppressed, from the ground up.

During the pandemic so many unlikely heroes emerged, from the youngest to the oldest, each determined to play their part in making life better for others who were suffering. For a short while there was a sense of equality around the world as we all faced the same affliction. That moment of unity appears to have passed, but it is still true that God asks us to use our saltiness to be a spiritual fertiliser to share and grow and promote the growth of others.

Prayers of intercession

God of all, we pray for the communities we live in and those across this world that we are associated with. We pray for the people we encounter in our localities. For colleagues, friends and neighbours. For those who are suffering and those who are well. For those who are finding the cost of living hard to bear and for those who want for nothing. For those we like and those we don't. For the leaders and those who are led. For the powerful people, and the powerless. For everyone we encounter in our daily lives, we pray for them all and ask that you bring your transformation and divine peace.

God of all, revitalise our communities and bring hope and light. Amen

15 February – I was there

Peter gives his eyewitness account of Jesus being transformed by the light of God's glory. Writing about it later to the early Christians, he has had time to savour and to review his overwhelming experience and remains convinced that Jesus will return to rise as the morning star in our hearts.

The scene of transfiguration is the focus of our readings today: something being changed before our eyes. Moses encounters God on Mount Sinai and the people of God are changed by the Ten Commandments. Jesus is transfigured himself in the accounts by Peter and Matthew as a revelation of God, and Jesus as the Son of God. This week we consider the life-changing impact of these events.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Transfiguration Year A
Exodus 24.12-18; Psalm 99; **2 Peter 1.16-21**; Matthew 17.1-9

2 Peter 1:16-21 [NIV]

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.

²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.



Thought for the week: I was there

Have you ever listened to a eulogy at a funeral and thought, 'If that was me, I would have wanted to leave out that part!' The great thing about recounting an event from your own life is that you can do a little editing, because it is your story to tell in the way that makes the most sense to you.

The account of the transfiguration on the mountain, as recorded by Matthew, is echoed by Peter's later letter. Even if not written by Peter himself, the memory rings true as a record of what he experienced and how he felt. Looking at the event across the three synoptic Gospels, Peter features centre stage in each. Matthew recorded that Peter offered to put up three dwellings, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Luke's account adds 'not knowing what he said'. Mark goes further, justifying the impetuous suggestion with the reasonable explanation: 'for they were terrified'. Between these three reports of one event there are varying levels of information, just as we would expect to find in contemporary articles across a range of newspapers. We each see an event from an angle, or hear it from a source, or choose to include or forget some details.

Has anyone been a witness to an event that they were asked later to describe, perhaps an accident? It's rare to have all the details – by the time you realise it is happening it is over and you missed the crucial moment – for example, before you heard the impact, you would not have looked in the right direction to notice the car skidding.

Peter was there, very present, with supernatural events unfolding close-up and shining with glory. Even though terrified, and no doubt blinded to some details, he would never forget the moment and how it made him feel. It is therefore interesting that when he tells the story for himself, he leaves out the whole business about the shelters and makes no mention of his confusion and fear. What he focuses on is the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ and the voice of 'Majestic Glory' confirming Jesus as God's Son. Everything else had become insignificant in the light of that glory.

In his re-telling, he speaks of the present darkness and then looks forward to the day that will dawn when the morning star rises in our hearts. For him, and he hopes for his readers, his personal encounter on the mountain confirms this – that Jesus will come again in glory. He should know: he was there!

A sending out prayer

God of all creation, radiant with the light of your glory, let us know that, like your Son Jesus, we too are marked by your love and the focus of your delight.

Lead us to places of encounter, open our eyes to your glory, and inspire us to tell others of your love. Amen.

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