

ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
NEW YEAR TEXT WORSHIP SERVICE WITH COMMUNION
10.30 AM 5TH JANUARY 2025

REV DR JULIA BINNEY LEADING & REV DR JIM BINNEY PREACHING

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.

Find us on Facebook @ Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



THEME: 'Keeping our eyes on Jesus' (Hebrews 12:2 NLT)

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Our God is faithful. YES!

God's infinite love is eternal. YES!

We declare Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father! YES! YES! And AMEN!

BP&W 384:

Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,
For by His power each tree and flower
Was planned and made.

Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it,
Sun, moon and stars in heaven
Cry, 'Jesus is Lord!'

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
Praise Him with hallelujahs
For Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Yet from His throne eternal
In flesh He came to die in pain
On Calvary's tree.
Jesus is Lord! From Him all life proceeding,
Yet gave His life a ransom
Thus setting us free.

Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
From death He rose, and all His foes
Shall own His name.

Jesus is Lord! God sent His Holy Spirit
To show by works of power
That Jesus is Lord.

A NEW YEAR PRAYER OF PRAISE:

Lord God, we come before you together at the start of a new year, with joy and gratitude in our hearts.

We come to lift our voices, to sing your praises and to declare your faithfulness.

Lord of past, present and future, we worship you now.

We praise you for all the ways you have blessed us in the last year, all the ways we have experienced your love, goodness, kindness, mercy, care, strength and guidance.

Lord of past, present and future, we worship you now.

We gather with all your people from across the world, to bring you our thanksgiving, to offer our service and to bow before you in heartfelt devotion.

Lord of past, present and future, we worship you now.

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

As we worship, we are conscious of the ways we have failed you in the last year.

You have blessed us, but we have failed to appreciate your blessings.

You have given us daily guidance, but we repeatedly ignore it.

You have provided opportunities for us to serve, and we have wasted them.

You have given us new life in Christ, and time and again we turn back to our old ways.

Forgive us and help us to serve you, obey you, trust you and look to you.

May this new year be a new beginning, a new chapter for us.

Help us to live each day as your gift,

Nurtured by the love of Christ, renewed through your Holy Spirit,

And so may we live to your praise and glory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours

now and for ever and ever. Amen.

FAMILY TIME: Looking Through the Right Lens

(There will be an offering taken during the following song, and after the song the children will leave us for their own groups)

MP 1100: https://youtu.be/FM-zB-AH8Xc?si=8xTy7kCYBEfSL5_6

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord,

Open the eyes of my heart.

I want to see you,

I want to see you. *(repeat)*

*To see you high and lifted up,
Shining in the light of Your glory.
Pour out your power and love,
As we sing, 'holy, holy, holy.'*

Holy, holy, holy,
Holy, holy, holy,
Holy, holy, holy,
I want to see you.

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PRAYER OF DEDICATION

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLE READING: Isaiah 53:1-6 (NIV)

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE READING: Hebrews 12:1-3 (NLT)

SERMON: KEEPING OUR EYES ON JESUS (Hebrews 12:2 NLT)

According to a recent article in the New Yorker magazine American Evangelical Christians are obsessed with 'Guns and Jesus' justifying this view by appealing to Second Amendment and the original intent of the Founding Fathers when writing to guarantee citizens 'the biblical right of self-defence.' Whatever one may think about this (and I think it appalling) it is just one example of what I call 'Jesus plus thinking' where, rather than adhering to a simple and straightforward Jesus-centred faith, many Christians seem preoccupied by the necessity to qualify their faith in Jesus by adding various adjectives or adverbs to their confession of faith – not always helpfully so. Thus, someone might well describe themselves as an 'evangelical Christian' or a 'liberal Christian' or a 'Charismatic Christian' or a 'Reformed Christian' etc., etc. The Jesus plus stuff can also be more subtle than this and take the form of 'Jesus plus legalism' or 'Jesus plus morality' or 'Jesus plus a particular view of the Second Coming' etc., etc.

This trend is not new, however, hence the Writer to the Hebrews' exhortation here to 'keep our eyes on Jesus' (Hebrews 12:2 NLT). The Writer (in common with the other various New Testament Writers) recognised that the New Testament Church, even in its infancy, was already being subjected to the Jesus plus stuff, in particular, the stuff being trundled out by the 'Judaisers' and the 'Gnostics'. In simple terms the Judaisers were converts from the Jewish religion who still retained a lot of legalistic ideas stemming from their roots in Judaism. Thus they taught that in order to be a proper Christian it was necessary not simply to believe in Jesus... you had to believe in Jesus but also take on board a lot of the legalistic rules and regulations found in the Jewish Law, such as Sabbath observance, purity laws, and so on. They were very much like today's legalistic/moralistic Christians who seem obsessed with man-made rules and regulations.

The Gnostics were converts from a Greek/Gentile background who taught that in order to be a proper Christian (a genuine Spirit-filled Christian) you needed something extra added to simple faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour. The Greek word *gnosis* means 'knowledge'. Needless to say, this secret knowledge/experience/anointing was something only they could impart. This served to make their hearers feel inadequate, beholden, dependent. They were like some Charismatic/



Pentecostal Christians today (not all) who claim some special relationship with, anointing from, God that puts them above the rest and infers an arrogant two-tier level of Christian experience.

It is in the face of this that the Writer exhorts and encourages us, to 'keep looking to Jesus' (v.2) rather than engage with all the Jesus plus stuff. The Writer exhorts us to 'fix our eyes on Jesus' (v.2 NIV) where the Greek word translated 'fix our eyes' indicates 'the action of one who, aware of rival attractions, deliberately looks away to Jesus.' This is reinforced in the next verse where the Writer exhorts the reader to 'consider him' (v.3 NIV) i.e. Jesus, where the Greek word used is actually a mathematical word meaning 'reckon up, add up the respective figures' and encourages the reader to 'take a long calculated look at Jesus' rather than a hurried glance.

It would seem to Julia and myself, as we are about to retire from Pastoral Ministry, move away from Reading, and hopefully leave you in the good hands of a fellow Minister who we respect and esteem, that this is a great text to leave you with for 2025. 'Keep Your Eyes on Jesus' (Hebrews 12:2 NLT). Forget the Jesus plus stuff and concentrate on Jesus. But what does this mean?

1. JESUS, THE COMPASSIONATE MAN: When the Writer exhorts us to 'keep our eyes on Jesus' (v.2) it is suggested that the reference here is primarily to the human Jesus rather than the divine Christ. The Writer deliberately uses the name Jesus (not Jesus the Christ) in order to underline the Incarnation. Why is this? It is because the Writer wants us to recognise that God is not up there, out there, distant from us, but someone who has made himself known to us in a real way in the Person of Jesus Christ. Moreover he is a compassionate, caring, loving Saviour. He did not come to moralise or legalise but strengthen and invigorate. As Matthew tells us. 'When he saw the crowds, [Jesus] had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:36).

2. JESUS, THE VICTORIOUS PIONEER: The Writer speaks here of Jesus 'the pioneer... of our faith' (v.2 NIV) where the Greek word translated 'pioneer' is indicative of 'someone who has gone before' and successfully prepared the way ahead for those who will follow. If we are to run the Christian race effectively we need to realise that Jesus has already gone before us. He has pioneered the way ahead for us, broken the ground before us. We do not know what lays ahead of us in 2025. Some of us may be apprehensive... but we have no need to fear. Jesus has already walked that road and prepared the way ahead for us. We can therefore be confident that 'When we walk, our steps will not be hampered; when we run, we will not stumble' (Proverbs 4:12).

3. JESUS, THE PERFECTER OF FAITH: The Writer also tells us that Jesus not only goes before us (to prepare the way) but also that he follows on after us and 'perfects our faith' (v.2). The Greek word translated 'perfects' here means 'to finish, complete, bring to a successful conclusion'. In this Christian race we are called to run (v.1) we need to recognise that having begun something in us, God will complete that which he has begun (Philippians 1:6). God has done – is doing – something amazing here at Abbey, and he will not stop doing what he is doing just because Julia and I are retiring and moving away. Our commission from God, when he called us to Abbey was firstly, to give Abbey a future (there were only a faithful few here when we came in 2018), and secondly, to find someone who could possibly succeed Julia and take the church forward into the next chapter of its mission and ministry. This we believe we have done, and we are confident God will lead you forward into this exciting next stage in 2025.

4. JESUS, THE DEVOTED SERVANT: The Writer speaks to us of Jesus who 'because of the joy awaiting him... endured the cross, disregarding its shame' (v.2). This takes us back to the picture of Jesus as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12), and to Paul's Christological hymn of the New Testament Church (Philippians 2:5-11). Jesus saw his mission through to the end – the cross,

descent into Hades, resurrection from the dead – all for the joy awaiting him, the joy of (seeing into the future) millions of people (and indeed creation itself) redeemed from the power of Satan, sin, death and an empty, wasted way of life. If Jesus 'rejoiced with uncontainable joy' at the success of the mission of the Seventy-Two (Luke 10:21) that was nothing compared with the joy he experienced in anticipation of millions being redeemed... including you and me!

5. JESUS, THE EFFECTIVE PRIEST: The Writer concludes recognising that, having fulfilled his earthly mission, Jesus is 'now... seated in the place of honour beside God's throne' (v.2). And what is he doing there? He is interceding for us. Paul tells us that Jesus 'is sitting in the place of honour at God's right hand, pleading for us' (Romans 8:34). His very presence is intercession. Jesus perfectly fulfils the role of priest – representing God to humanity, and humanity to God. In his Incarnation and Passion Jesus became 'the One mediator who can reconcile God and humanity' (1 Timothy 2:5 NLT). The word 'mediator' means 'bridge builder. Jesus rebuilt the broken bridge between God and humanity and made a way back to God possible for us all. Moreover, right now in Heaven Jesus is prayerfully interceding for us (Hebrews 7:25). If nobody else is praying for us... Jesus is! Which is another reason why we can all be confident about the future. If James is correct (and I believe he is) that 'the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results' (James 5:16)... think what the prayers of Jesus for us can do!

Qualifying words such as adjectives and adverbs are sometimes necessary, even helpful, as long as they don't mask the crucial. When Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, they were not immediately known as 'Christians' (that came much later, see Acts 11:26) or even 'disciples' but simply 'followers' (Mark 1:16-20)... followers of Jesus. There is a lot to be said for this. Bottom line is that we are to centre in on Jesus. As Isaiah prophetically puts words into Jesus' mouth (700 years before his birth): 'Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God... there is no other' (Isaiah 45:22 NLT)!

Hymn MP 1076:

Jesus, be the centre,
Be my source, be my light, Jesus.

Jesus, be the centre,
Be my hope, be my song, Jesus.

*Be the fire in my heart,
Be the wind in these sails,
Be the reason that I live,
Jesus, Jesus.*

Jesus, be my vision,
Be my path, be my guide, Jesus.

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COMMUNION

WORDS OF INVITATION:

We gather around the Lord's table at the beginning of a new year.

We are here to look back, here to look forward.

We are here to remember one who died, here to greet one who lives.

We are here to share bread and wine, here to share fellowship together.

We are here in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who invites us, as he invited his first disciples, to take supper with him.

He invites us to share bread and wine, you and I, who are weak and sinful, who daily deny him, who prefer our way to his, who have barely begun to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Though your faith is frail, your faults are many, you have many questions and much to learn, come now and share bread and wine. Come and receive life for your souls.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

INSTITUTION:

'The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way after supper he took the cup saying,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

This is the body of Christ, broken for you.

(take a piece of bread and eat as it is served to you)

This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

(we drink together once all have been served)

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember your death.

We celebrate your resurrection.

We rejoice in the wonder of your love.

We fix our eyes on you

And willingly embrace the new life you offer. Amen.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS: – Chris and Pauline Mbukwa

Almighty God, we thank you for the year that has ended, you have been faithful to us by keeping us in good health, providing us daily bread, protecting us, guiding us. Thank for the new year 2025 and we look up to you our founder and perfecter of our faith. In a world where there is war, political strife, hunger and natural disasters, help us not to be distracted, not to be afraid but to look up to you Jesus who is able to give us peace, joy and love. As the new year has begun, some people are hopeless, they have fear about how this year will end. We pray that that they will find hope in you and give us the grace to be an encouragement to the hopeless.

Lord, help us not be distracted but to keep our eyes focused on you

Dear Lord, thank you for your compassionate love towards us. Give us the grace to love others even those who have not known you yet, help us not be hypocrites in our christian journey like the pharisees and saducees who considered themselves holier and above others. Help us to be more like you humble and loving and caring to all even

sinner. Help us to have compassion towards the lost souls and win them to your kingdom.

Lord, help us not be distracted but to keep our eyes focused on you

Almighty God, we thank you for Reverend Julia and Jim for serving Abbey faithfully and selflessly. As they will be leaving next month, we pray that your grace will abound with them and that they will not lack any good thing because they have put their trust in you. We also pray that you will continue to direct Abbey church establish the plans, we pray that you will bless every member and bind us in unity.

Lord, help us not be distracted but to keep our eyes focused on you

Lord, you endured the cross for the joy that was set before you. Grant us the grace to endure the hardships that we may encounter in our christian walk. We pray for Christians who are being persecuted for the gospel in some parts of the World, your word in John 16:33 encourages that in this world we will have trouble but we should take heart because you have overcome the world.

Lord, help us not be distracted but to keep our eyes focused on you

MP 52:

God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus;
He came to love, heal, and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives.

*Because He lives I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives.*

How sweet to hold a new-born baby,
And feel the pride and joy he gives;
But greater still the calm assurance,
This child can face uncertain days because He lives.

And then one day I'll cross the river;
I'll fight life's final war with pain;
And then as death gives way to victory,
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He lives.

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THE BLESSING:

God bless to you the road that is before you.
God bless to you the friends who are around you.
God bless to you his love which is within you.
God bless to you the light that leads you onwards.
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Church Information:

Connect Groups after the service today:

We will be having refreshments and sharing together in our Connect Groups

The Leadership Course Session 4:

- Tuesday 7th January 2025 – 2.30 pm in person in the Brookside room.
- Friday 10th January 2025 – 7.30 pm on Zoom (ID: 828 1505 7805 Passcode: 461165).

Church Meeting:

After the service on Sunday 12th January

Baptismal Service: A baptismal service is being planned for 12th January and another one on February 9th. If you would like to be baptised and/or become a Church Member please speak to the Minister or one of the Deacons.

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please use the card reader at the back of the church or scan the following QR code below to pay.

QR Code for Offering:

