

Wednesday 24th November
The Song of the Three 35-65

Song of the Three Jews 35-67

'Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you heavens;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all you powers of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, sun and moon;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, stars of heaven;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.

'Bless the Lord, all rain and dew;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all you winds;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, fire and heat;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, dews and falling snow;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, nights and days;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, light and darkness;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, ice and cold;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, frosts and snows;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.

'Let the earth bless the Lord;
let it sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, mountains and hills;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all that grows in the ground;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, seas and rivers;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you springs;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you whales and all that swim in the waters;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all birds of the air;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all wild animals and cattle;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.

'Bless the Lord, all people on earth;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, O Israel;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.

'Bless the Lord, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishaël;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
For he has rescued us from Hades and saved us from the
power of death,
and delivered us from the midst of the burning fiery furnace;
from the midst of the fire he has delivered us.
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his mercy endures for ever.

Today's passage comes from the Apocrypha and is a late addition to the book of Daniel, dating to around 100 years before Christ. Some may remember it as the 'Benedicite' which was an optional canticle in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer service of Morning Prayer, an alternative to the Te Deum. We are providing a copy of the text since not all Bibles include the Apocrypha. It is a collection of texts which are deemed to be of secondary importance and authority as Scripture.

The three Jews of the title are the three men thrown into the burning fiery furnace according to the book of Daniel, during the Babylonian exile; here they are named as Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael; otherwise known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; the three whose faith in God saved them from the fire while they continued to praise God.

This is a lovely song and remarkably modern in its outlook in a way. It calls on all creation to praise and worship God. Or rather we could say it observes and celebrates the fact that all creation does praise and worship God. Mountains, hills, plants, creatures and etc simply doing their thing, as we may say, are giving glory to God. By being themselves and doing what they are meant to do whether it's growing or shining or running or swimming or singing, all of it gives glory to God.

The song works its way through the various forms of creation and arrives at humankind, exhorting them also to join in the chorus of praise. We often think about joining the unending song of the angels in our worship, but perhaps we are less familiar with the idea of joining the song of the created world as we pray.

We find a similar idea in the Psalms as well, which witness to the great hymn of praise rising from the created world. It reminds me of St Francis of Assisi and his acute sense of the connectedness of all creation with humankind; and of course ultimately it echoes Genesis 1 which proclaims that everything which came into being through the creative word of God was good, i.e. it reflected the goodness and glory of God.

Today we are recovering to some extent that lost sense of connectedness, at least there is a growing realisation of how our own actions have consequences for the whole of creation, far reaching and serious consequences; and a recognition of the responsibility we carry for the extinction of many species, many of them unknown to us. Countless more will disappear if we continue on our path of destruction.

Thus human beings have interrupted and in some sense silenced the song of praise rising to God from God's creatures. What a dreadful thing to do; and what a dreadful way to treat the earth given into our care and stewardship.

The animals were brought to us to name them; the earth was given us to till and care for it. Yet through neglect, carelessness and deliberate destruction we have despoiled God's good world. It behoves us now to immediately change our attitude; to value and protect nature. Next time you are out walking in the park or the countryside or in your own garden, look around you and remember this song; think of all the elements you can see praising God in their very being and existence, and give thanks to the God of endless variety and inventiveness.

*Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.*