

Worship Service

BY KAREN THOMAS SMITH

This service of worship is an invitation to faithful encounter, sharing, and dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Before God we may be open about our differences and disagreements, and honest about our similarities and agreements.

Prelude:

“Sonate Fugue No. 4 in C minor for Harpsichord/Piano”
*Setrak Setrakian (2003)*¹

The Blessing: Genesis 17:1-6; 22:17-18

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

*Call to Worship:*²

Leader: Peace be unto you. Salaam ualeikoum.

People: Ualeikoum salaam. And unto you, peace.

Hear the words of the Lord:

“Which of you desires life,
 and covets many days to enjoy good?”

**Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it."**

"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the children of God."

"And so if it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably
with all."

"For it is to peace that God has called you."

**"Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual
upbuilding."**

May it not be hidden from our eyes.

May the God of peace be with us all.

**And may the God of peace be praised among all the children of
Abraham,**

**and by all the nations which through Abraham are blessed!
Alleluia! Alhumdullilah!**

Hymn:

"The God of Abraham Praise" (verses 1, 4, 6, and 10)

The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love;
Jehovah, great I AM, by earth and heaven confessed:
we bow and bless the sacred Name for ever blessed.

The great I AM has sworn; we on this oath depend:
we shall, on eagle wings upborne, to heaven ascend.
We shall behold God's face; we shall God's power adore,
and sing the wonders of God's grace forevermore.

The goodly land we see, with peace and plenty blessed:
a land of sacred liberty and endless rest;
there milk and honey flow, and oil and wine abound,
and trees of life forever grow, with mercy crowned.

The God who reigns on high, the great archangels sing,
and "Holy, holy, holy," cry, "Almighty King!
Who was and is the same, and evermore shall be:
Jehovah, Father, great I AM, we worship thee."

*From THE YIGDAL of Daniel den Judah (c. 1400),
paraphrased by Thomas Olivers (1775), alt.*

Tune: LEONI

*Prayer of Praise*³

O God, you are God, besides whom there is no God: the Knower of the unseen and the seen; you are the Beneficent, the Merciful. You are God besides whom there is no god: the King, the Holy, the Giver of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness. Yours is the glory.

You are God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner. Yours are the most excellent names; whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares your glory. You are the Almighty, the All-wise.

As heaven and earth declare your glory, come to us, O God, and teach us to glorify your name. Amen.

Scripture Reading with Sung Response: Psalm 139

(Congregation sings "Be Thou My Vision"⁴)

**Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.**

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

**Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.**

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

**Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.**

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

**Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;
be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;
Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tower:
raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.**

O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil!
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

**High King of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.**

*Prayer of Repentance:*⁵

Lord, there are many such
dwelling in narrow resentments,
embittered by wrongs that others have inflicted,
confined to harsh enmities,
imprisoned in spirit by despair at evil deeds,
drained of hope and bereft of peace,
left to great hatred in this world.
Have mercy, good Lord, upon all these
whose world, through human malice,
despairs of human kindness.
Judge and turn their oppressors.
Release again, for the fearful,
the springs of trust and goodness.
Give them liberty of heart,
the liberty of those who leave room
for the judgment of God.
Enlarge our hearts, O God,
that we may do battle against evil
and bear the sorrows of the weary,
and seek and serve thy will.
Great art thou, O Lord,
there is none that is a match for thee. Amen.
O Lord, enlarge my heart (Surah 20:26).

Readings from the Three Abrahamic Faiths

From Jewish Scripture: Exodus 18:1-27

From a translation of the Qur'an: Surah 5:82b-85

You will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe to be those who say: We are Christians; this is because there

are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly. And when they hear what has been revealed to the apostle you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognize; they say: "Our Lord! we believe, so write us down with the witnesses of truth. And what reason have we that we should not believe in Allah and in the truth that has come to us, while we earnestly desire that our Lord should cause us to enter with the good people?"

Therefore Allah rewarded them on account of what they said, with gardens in which rivers flow to abide in them; and this is the reward of those who do good to others.

From the Gospel: John 4:19-24

Hymn:

"Hear the Prophet Speak of Water"

Terry York

Tune: TIRUPATI

(text and tune pp. 50-51 of this volume)

Sermon:

"God Is Greater"

Hymn:

"There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" (verses 1, 11, 5, and 8)

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in God's justice
which is more than liberty.

But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own.
And we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of one's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more simple,
we could take him at his word,
And our lives would be more loving
in the likeness of the Lord.

Frederick W. Faber (1854)

Tune: WELLESLEY

Prayers of the People:

O God, our God, there is no God but you alone, so we are surely yours. And we desire to come to your house where we do surely belong.

Mohammed proclaimed that your light is lit in houses of worship where your name is remembered and your praises sung (Surah 24:36). And while you are one God, Al Wahid, to you belong all the beautiful names so that whatever is in heaven and on earth shall sing your praises (Surah 59:24).

So as we make bold to address you, we seek your light and we call you by your many names. Hear us now as we lift to you our prayers of praise and gratitude:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Mighty, Al-Qadir, we praise you for your strength that comes to us in our weakness.

God the Provider, Ar Razzaq, we are grateful for your care in times of trouble and difficulty.

God the Most bounteous, Al Akram, we rejoice in the bounty you have shared with us that has sustained us and your world from age to age and in our day.

Let the people say: **Amen.**

You have said through Isaiah,

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 6:7).

Yet, Jesus told us plainly that we have made your house a den of thieves, and he took a whip and brought to light the violence that was there, usurping prayer.

God who Sees, Al Basir, help us to see our complicity in injustice and lead us to repentance. Hear us now as we ask your forgiveness for the ways we have allowed corruption, abuse, unfairness, and other evils to become acceptable in our sight, even in our institutions of worship and care-giving:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Forgiving, Al-Ghafur, be for us as you have been, the one who can set us on the path that is straight (Surah 1:5).

Let the people say: **Amen.**

When you saved him from his enemies, David said to you, O God:

“The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my savior; you save me from violence” (2 Samuel 22: 1-3).

And yet, O God, so many are not saved from violence, evil, and injustice. Have regard for your covenant, for lands that are torn by hatred and destruction, including our own land. So many do not find refuge in your house, in your fortress. How long, O Lord, shall they go mourning?

Hear us as we pray for those places in our world that are haunted by oppression and violence and other devastating evils:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Secure One, Al Mumin, extend the walls of your fortress of refuge to cover these lands stricken by terror that your light, God of Light, An Nur, may drive out the darkness therein.

Grant that the words of Isaiah may be true,

“Violence shall no more be heard in your land,
devastation or destruction within your borders;
you shall call your walls Salvation,
and your gates Praise” (Isaiah 60:18).

Let the people say: **Amen.**

Your servant Job prayed to you in despair, O God:

“Even when I cry out, ‘Violence!’ I am not answered;
I call aloud, but there is no justice.

You have walled up my way so that I cannot pass” (Job 19:7-8b).

For victims of violence and injustice, O God, walls do not protect but entrap, they are not a refuge but a prison.

Hear us now as we pray for those we know who have suffered evils of all kinds, who suffer still from their wounds, and who long for security and salvation:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Great One, El Kabir, you are great in your healing. For all whose bodies, minds, and souls have been ravaged and are in need of healing, fulfill the promise of blessing spoken by Tobit, "Acknowledge the Lord, for he is good, and bless the King of the ages, so that his tent may be rebuilt in you in joy. May he cheer all those within you who are captives, and love all those within you who are distressed, to all generations forever" (Tobit 13:10).

Let the people say: **Amen.**

Through Mohammed we have heard the hope that you, O God, may yet place affection between us and those whom we now consider our enemies. For you are all-powerful and forgiving, ever merciful (Surah 60:7).

Help us to hold out hope for reconciliation in this torn world. Teach us again, as Jesus taught us, to pray for enemies and bless those who curse us, so that prayer may be turned into peace and cursing transformed into blessing for all of us, your people, and for our posterity.

Hear us now as we speak to you our hopes for reconciliation and transformation:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God, you are the Alpha and the Omega, the First, Al-Awwal, and the Last, Al Akhir. May we find our ending as our beginning in your peace, God of peace, As-Salam, and may we dwell in your house of peace forever and ever.

Let the people say: **Amen.**

Offering:

(An offering is received to support a joint ministry between Christian and Muslim communities.)

Hymn of Offering:

"O God of Earth and Altar" (verses 1 and 2)

O God of earth and altar, bow down and hear our cry,
our earthly rulers falter, our people drift and die;
the walls of gold entomb us, the swords of scorn divide,
take not thy thunder from us, but take away our pride.

From all that terror teaches, from lies of tongue and pen,
from all the easy speeches that comfort cruel men,
from sale and profanation of honor, and the sword,
from sleep and from damnation, deliver us, good Lord!

G. K. Chesterton (1906)

Suggested Tunes: LLANGLOFFAN or PASSION CHORALE

*Benediction.*⁶

And now let us go forth in peace.
May our way be resolute
and our purpose firm in your good counsel.
May we be granted, O Lord,
the benefit of gratefulness for your grace,
the beauty that belongs with your worship.
And may we be given pure and reverent hearts, uprightness of
character,
tongues that speak right, and deeds that are worthy,
O Lord God. Amen.

NOTES

1 Available from SibeliusMusic online at www.sibeliusmusic.com.

2 Based on Psalm 34:12, 14; Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18; 1 Corinthians 7:15b; and Romans 14:19.

3 With phrases from Surah 59:1, 22-24 in the translation by M. H. Shakir of *The Holy Qur'an* (available online at www.hti.umich.edu/k/koran/index.html). Because the Qur'an was revealed by God in Arabic, Muslims stress that all "English Qur'ans" are merely translations and are not trustworthy. The Shakir translation is used throughout this service.

4 Stanzas reordered from an ancient Irish text versed by Eleanor Hull, 1912, altered; Tune: SLANE.

5 Kenneth Cragg, *Common Prayer: A Muslim-Christian Spiritual Anthology*, (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 73. Used by permission.

6 Adapted from a passage by *Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali* (1058-1128) translated by Kenneth Cragg in *Common Prayer*, 80.