# THE NEW SHOFAR

To be a Christ-bearer and a Spirit-bearer means to have the God-man Christ constantly in your soul, to live in Him, think in Him, feel in Him, act in Him." — **St. Justin Popovich**

***January 18th***

**Firstly – some biblical theology**

There are four "**Servant Songs"** in Isaiah (42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) and collectively they have provided Christians with a profound insight into the person and ministry of Jesus. Both the New Testament and the Fathers of the Church interpret these as Messianic prophecies, unified by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and fulfilled in Christ.

The Servant Songs are to be found within Isaiah (chapters 40-55), with a scholarly consensus dating them to the period of the Babylonian Exile (**End date**: 538 BC **Start date**: 16 March 597 BC). During this time, the Jewish people endured captivity and suffering because of their sins. Within their original historical context, these prophecies are often understood as ***not*** directly referring to Christ, though the Church, from its earliest days, began to read them as prophetic utterances that speak of the coming of the Messiah (Jesus Christ). The Christian principle of the unity of Scripture and divine authorship leads to the conclusion that the four Servant Songs directly speak about Jesus, given the unity of the Holy Spirit as their author.

Christian theological interpretation emphasises this unity of both the Old and New Testaments, presenting the Servant Songs as a prime example of how the Old Testament prophetically anticipates and promises what the New Testament fulfills.

Old Testament prophetically anticipates and promises what the New Testament definitively fulfills.

This demonstrates the divine authorship of Scripture and the absolute certainty of God's promises – what God promises, God himself will bring about.

The Church teaches that the Old Testament is to be read in the light of Christ crucified and risen, and that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, while the Old Testament is unveiled in the New. This approach, rooted in the belief that God speaks through human beings in human fashion, also emphasises interpreting the text with attention to the unity of the whole of Scripture. The Servant Songs illustrate how God's redemptive purpose maintains perfect continuity from the Old Testament to the New, with Jesus Christ serving as its ultimate mediator and guarantor. Thus, we can affirm that to understand what God is saying to believers today, through the Old Testament, text must be interpreted through the lens of Jesus Christ, his life, his death and the reality of him now reigning from God's right hand.

Biblical text must be interpreted with attention given to the unity of the whole of Scripture.

The New Testament writers repeatedly draw from these texts, demonstrating how Jesus' ministry, suffering, death, and exaltation correspond precisely to Isaiah's prophecies. The way the New Testament authors interpret and use texts from the Old Testament must remain a fundamental aspect of the way in which Christ's disciples read those same texts. What such a method illustrates is the way the Spirit has been unveiling the divine plan through the

prophets and teachers of Israel. The entire Old Testament highlights the way God has been preparing the world, through the Chosen People Israel, for the great saving works of Jesus Chris. The New Testament effectively functions as an inspired commentary on the Old, revealing Christ as the end towards which history has been moving.

**I will give you as a light to the nations**

Why is this important? One reason is that the Bible itself outlines for us the dimensions of the saving works of God. As Israel struggles with its own identity, with the manifold temptations what come her way as she seeks to live a life faithful to the Covenant God had made with them at Mt Sinai, so we can better value and appreciate the central role God must play in the lives of all men and women. In the way the Hebrew people struggled with sin and forgiveness, vocation and temptation, they set down for the entire human population the only way the fullness of the human person can be reached. Who am I? Why am I here? What happens when we die? Can I be healed of my sins and failings? All these and more are answered for us, by the Holy Spirit, in the story of Israel. All of that is then explored and lived out in Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God and Messiah.

Today's reading from Isaiah highlights for us one such divine expectation: *I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.* This is a great headline for our lives as faith communities and as individual believers in this new year. Sinful and limited though we may be, through divine grace, each of us, and collectively as the Body of Christ in today's world, we are called upon to be God's light in all human communities. *It is not enough*, says the prophet, that we live out our Christian vocations with a priority on our own parish communities. That is significant, but God, in Jesus Christ, demands more. We are God's *light bearers*, illuminating for a world that is searching for Truth the Way to peace, joy, contentment and life eternal. We are living lights; men and women of faith whose way of living reveals God's love and mercy for all.

This is what Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians… *Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.* For reasons known only to God, we are called, in baptism, to be apostles, missionaries, ministers of Christ. We are baptised in order to make Christ known and individually and as faith communities we exist for no other purpose.

Every Christian believer is both a 'God-bearer' (one made in the image of God, created to worship God) and a 'Christ-bearer' (one united with Christ, being conformed to the likeness of Christ). Whether we recognize it or not, in all that we say and do—whether good or bad—we bear the name of God and the name of Christ. That has profound implications for how we conduct ourselves and how we treat other people. Non-believers will come to conclusions about the nature of God and the divine saving and transforming works to be experienced in Jesus Christ by the way we model discipleship.