

Our Sunday Service Together

Advent 3, December 11th 2022



An Acclamation for the Season

All: Alleluia, alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia, alleluia!

Preparation

All: This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Through the brokenness of Christ, we become one body
as one body we now gather in the name of Christ to offer our praise and thanksgiving, to receive God's
holy word, to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins, that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Our Confession

God the Father forgives us in Christ and heals us by the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness, all slander and malice, and confess our sins to God our redeemer.

All: Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord, we come to you in sorrow for our sins, and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

Be still for a moment in confession and in receiving God's Grace in Christ

All: May Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to God's truth, strengthen us to do God's will and give us the joy of his kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Risen Lord.

Amen.

The opening prayer

All: The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

The Psalmody Psalm 146.5-10 *We say the psalm aloud*

Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them;
who keeps his promise for ever;

Who gives justice to those that suffer wrong and bread to those who hunger.

The Lord looses those that are bound; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind;

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous;

The Lord watches over the stranger in the land;

he upholds the orphan and widow;

but the way of the wicked he turns upside down.

The Lord shall reign for ever, your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Scripture Reading Isaiah 35.1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.'

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water;

the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

At the end of the reading we say:

All: This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Gloria

All: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The Gospel

Matthew 11.2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' ⁴Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.' ⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."
¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

At the end of the reading we say:

All: This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

A Reflection for the day

I always find it difficult not to merge reflections on the readings for last week and this week in Advent. Both feature John the Baptist and talk of going ahead of the Messiah and preparing a way.

However, where last week we find John filled with confidence in declaring Jesus is the Messiah, this week as he sits in prison, things seem a bit different, it is as if he is now not sure of things!

I actually think this is not the case, I think John is still confident about Jesus, but now wants his disciples to share in his assuredness that Jesus is the promised Messiah. And more, that they know what sort of Messiah Jesus is. Jesus use of the motif of a reed shaken by the wind may well have been a reference to Herod Antipas, the so called king of Israel who had taken the reed as the symbol of his reign.

It is thought that Jesus is making the point he has not come to overthrow the crown; this is not his Messianic ministry. Jesus was never about removing and replacing Herod Antipas, or Caesar for that matter, his is about redeeming their hearts, if they would be open to him, and through them redeeming the nations.

The other crossover theme between last week and this, is that of the road in the wilderness – of the path for travel. 'Prepare the way of the Lord' is John's cry in the wilderness; using the words of Isaiah. Today Isaiah brings us mention of the road again, 'the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray'.

I do love the hope that the words 'not even fools shall go astray' brings!

The people had wandered through the desert for many years en route to the promised land, and much had led them astray (arguments, false worship, lack of patience). The journey into God's promises is fraught with the danger of going astray. But now there will be a road built that even fools can't go astray on, if they follow it. If they follow it! I suspect that's the key, we have to take the journey, we have to walk ahead if we are to enter into the promises of God.

In our world of instant expectation there is often no room for taking the journey. Often today the phrase 'are we there yet' is replaced by 'why am I not there – now?' The only way, of course, to get along the road, however straight and level it may be, is to make the journey.

Advent reminds us of this! For God to redeem the world required a journey from the heart of the Divine mystery into the very present blood and bones world of human existence. For our part we are called to journey to an encounter with God incarnate, just as did the Magi, the shepherds and the angelic hosts.

We may not be able to go astray when walking the road of Christ into the promises of God, but we do have to get up on our feet and walk his way!

The Creed

All: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Prayers *We make our intercessions*

O God of peace, who has taught us that in quietness and confidence shall be our strength; help us, as we come into your presence, to be still and know that you are God.

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ let us pray to the Father.

As we continue to journey through Advent let us open our hearts and minds to receive anew the gift of Jesus into our lives. Let us give thanks that in baptism we started our journey and continue to live in faith.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Strengthen Bishops Michael and Ruth, and all laity and clergy who seek to serve you in this diocese. May they be filled with the Spirit and serve you as the first disciples.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We Pray for our King, Prime Minister, and all World leaders, that they may have the Spirit of wisdom to lead us through difficult times. May they always use their power for the good of the people and avoid the temptation to personal gain.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for the hungry and starving, that the available food may be used for the benefit of all.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for our families, friends, and neighbours that we may serve Christ in one another and seek the common good.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for the sick, suffering and dying and we give thanks and pray for those who use their skill and risk their lives to care for them.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Hear us as we remember those who have died, according to your promises grant them a share in your eternal kingdom.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all your saints, we commend ourselves and the whole creation to your unfailing love. Amen.

The Collect

All: O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Gathering our prayers and praises into one, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.

The Conclusion

All: Christ, as a light illumine and guide me this day.
Christ, as a shield overshadow me.
Christ under me, Christ over me;
Christ beside me on my left and my right.
This day be within and without me. Amen.