

Our Sunday Service Together

Advent 4, December 18th 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 80.1-7 *We say the psalm aloud*

Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, you that led Joseph like a flock;
Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim, before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your mighty strength and come to our salvation.
Turn us again, O God; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry at your people's prayer?
You feed them with the bread of tears; you give them abundance of tears to drink.
You have made us the derision of our neighbours, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Scripture Reading Isaiah 7.10-16

¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹² But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. ¹³ Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

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 1.18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy

Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

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

This time of the year has seen the same discussion in our house, wherever we have lived – from our first flat through to the Rectory; 'Where are we going to put all the bits and pieces gathered and plonked down through the year so we have space for the Christmas tree?'

We know where the tree is to go, we know how to put it up and decorate it, but getting room for it to glisten and shine and have that warm, 'it will soon be Christmas' vibe, is always the task to be had.

So we move the furniture around, discover things we thought lost, throw out those items which should have gone in the bin when they first came into the house, and clear space, clean up, sort out and make things possible.

The story of the angel come to Mary is one of making the work of God possible; realised in fact. The prophets, Isaiah especially, had talked for a long time of God looking to realise a great blessing, of bringing to birth something unknown and never seen before; the very living, breathing presence of God through the work of the Spirit of God, amongst humanity.

The realisation of this great blessing could only come through someone being open to the possibility, someone prepared to say 'I am not sure how this is possible, but if it is God's purpose then make it so'. In Mary, Mariam as the original language says, God found someone open to the possibility that God had a purpose in the world and that bringing this to birth would take human involvement. In essence, Mary made space in her heart and mind for the possibilities of God to be realised, and gave over the space of her women to see the purposes of God come to birth through the work of the Spirit.

And so was born 'The Way' God would bring the great blessing of salvation to Israel and the redemption of all humanity. So was born the pattern for God's redeeming work as the Spirit found space in humanity to bring love, peace, healing, and justice. So was born the way of following Jesus the Christ, in faith, with heart mind, soul and body, in the presence and power of the Spirit of God.

As we turn in this final week of Advent and look to Christmas day, and the celebration of God with us - Emmanuel, we are asked again to make space for the possibilities of God in Christ in our own lives. To clear out and tidy up the clutter the past year's living has created. To make space for the work of the Spirit come to us. To be people who are open to the reality that God is always looking to bring to birth love and peace in the world and looks to you and me to be his agencies.

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 prepare for Christmas let us open our hearts and minds once more to welcome the gift of Jesus into our lives.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Strengthen Bishop Michael and Ruth, and those 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 well. 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 homeless, hungry and starving, that families may have food to celebrate and children may have the comfort of cribs.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

In the spirit of Christmas let us 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: God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, 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.