

Our Sunday Service Together

Advent 3, December 17th 2023



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 126 *We say the psalm aloud*

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with songs of joy.

Then said they among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'

The Lord has indeed done great things for us, and therefore we rejoiced.

Restore again our fortunes, O Lord, as the river beds of the desert.

Those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed, will come back with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves with them.

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 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24

Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

²³ May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

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 John 1.6-8 and 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' ²¹ And they asked him,

'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' ²² Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' ²³ He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' ²⁶ John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

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

St Paul lived quite a remarkable life of faith. We first meet him as a young zealous persecutor of the fledgling group known as the followers of 'The Way'. This was title given to the early church; it was several decades before folks were called Christians – those who followed, and lived a life in the teachings of the Christ.

In his own words Paul describes his early life to us, 'a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless' (Philippians 3.5-6). After he comes to faith in the Messiah, in The Christ, Paul is imprisoned, beaten, found wandering from town to town to work, dependant on the good grace of others to live by and preach the gospel, ship wrecked, bitten by snakes, imprisoned again, and finally executed for his words against a corrupt and morally bankrupt regime. In many ways a prophet, like John the Baptizer who would be executed himself by a corrupt and morally bankrupt king.

In one of the accounts of Paul in prison we find him singing psalms and praising God, which would seem strange until we read his words in Thessalonians – 'in all circumstances, give thanks'. I'm am sure Paul was not giving thanks for being stuck in prison and facing trial, possible a beating, or maybe worse. This is not a situation to be thankful for, and if anyone said to you to be thankful 'for' any circumstance, they should be ignored, for do such a thing is frankly stupid. But to give thanks 'in' all circumstances is not to accept any situation but to live within hope in what Christ has already achieved.

Both John the Baptizer and Paul are pre-occupied with what God had achieved in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, and the promised future to be fulfilled, for all who believe and follow as well as for the world as a whole.

Neither men jettison their normal life with all its responsibilities and relationships, within the community as a whole. They embrace life with faith, and in the incarnational pattern of their master live faith in every aspect of life, testing if things are good, or not, and being attentive to those things whilst avoiding all that is not good. They do this within the hope of the future promised in Jesus.

In Corinthians Paul suggests the world about him lives in a sadness, without hope, 'eating, drinking, in merriment looking to the day they die'. But, for the follower of 'The Way, for the disciple of Christ Jesus, there is a hope and calling to be lived out 'to pray, give thanks, be holy, for tomorrow we LIVE'!

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*

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 our Bishop, 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 the King, Prime Minister, and all World leaders, that they may have the Spirit of wisdom to lead. As we approach the season of peace may they use their power for the good of the people and avoid the temptation to personal gain. We pray especially for Palestine and Israel, for Ukraine and Russia, for Iraq, Syria and the Sudan, may these lands and the people know peace.
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

The Collect

All: God for whom we watch and wait, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord. 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.