

Our Sunday Service Together

Christmas 2023



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 89.1-4 and 19-26 *We say the psalm aloud*

My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I proclaim your faithfulness throughout all generations.

I will declare that your love is established for ever; you have set your faithfulness as firm as the heavens.

For you said: 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

' "Your seed will I establish for ever and build up your throne for all generations." '

You spoke once in a vision and said to your faithful people: 'I have set a youth above the mighty;

I have raised a young man over the people.

'I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him.

'My hand shall hold him fast and my arm shall strengthen him.

'No enemy shall deceive him, nor any wicked person afflict him.

'I will strike down his foes before his face and beat down those that hate him.

'My truth also and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his head be exalted.

'I will set his dominion upon the sea and his right hand upon the rivers.

'He shall call to me, "You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation;"

'And I will make him my firstborn, the most high above the kings of the earth.

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 Romans 16.25-27

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever! Amen.

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.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours

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 Revd John Webb writes

When I was chaplain with the army apprentices I used to do a session on 'If I was God'. They would come up with all sorts of interesting and good ideas to solve the world's problems. They would solve the curses of war, poverty, sickness, famine, homelessness, etc on the assumption that God was some sort of all-powerful celestial power and that we are relatively powerless. This I suggest is the general assumption and certainly seems to have been the expectation in the Old Testament at the time Jesus was born. That is why that when the Wise Men were looking for Jesus they went to Herod on the assumption that Jesus would be found there.

At Christmas Jesus reverses the roles and instead of leaving us to speculate what God is like he came to show us. And the Christmas story tells us something quite different. Jesus wasn't born in a palace; he wasn't even born in a normal home but in an outhouse with the animals. There was no birth announcement in the media but it was to the shepherds who were about the bottom of the social scale that the good news was sent. He chose to come as a helpless baby entirely dependent on his parents and their supporters. He relied on the generosity of friends and became a refugee while still a baby. His birth was in every way the opposite of what had been expected. Little is known about him growing up except for a visit to Jerusalem, where he talked with the scholars in the temple. As a young man he worked as a labourer and didn't have a privileged education or go to university.

But it was when he was in his early thirties that he was baptised by John the Baptist. This was clearly a seminal event both for him and John. He then started his ministry of teaching and healing, miracles and mixing freely with all of society and especially the weak and disadvantaged. He preached the deceptively simple but radical gospel that the essence of God is love. The crowds loved and followed him, but those in positions of power both in the church and state felt threatened and after only a few years they turned on him.

To the surprise of his followers he went humbly to his death without calling supernatural force to save him and they were shattered and dejected by his death. Then to everybody's surprise on Easter Day he showed that his death was not the end, but a new beginning. In his resurrection appearances he inspired his followers to establish the church and preach the Gospel of love which he had taught them. In every

generation since then ordinary people have been inspired to serve society in his name and after his example. It is now our turn.

That is why it important that we celebrate the birth of Christ to-day because it marked the beginning of a new order in the history of the world. We are invited to become part of that new order. Thank God for Christmas.

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 celebrate the Birth of Christ 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 ask for strength to continue to live in faith. *Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.*

Strengthen Michael our Bishop and all who seek to serve you in this diocese at this critical time in the history of the church. 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 us through this difficult time. *Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.*

As we enjoy our celebrations let us remember those who are less fortunate. We pray for the hungry and homeless. We pray for those who suffer as a result of war that there may be peace. *Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.*

We give thanks for and 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 joy of Christmas, we commend ourselves and the whole creation to your unfailing love. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, at this joyful Christmas time and for evermore. Amen.

The Collect

All: Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God. 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.