

Our Sunday Service Together

Advent 3, December 15th 2024



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 Zephaniah 3.14 to end

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.

The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time.

And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time, I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

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 Luke 3.7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' ⁸ Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' ¹¹ In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' ¹² Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' ¹³ He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

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

What if God barged into the midst of our daily lives, if God made God's presence known? How would you feel? How would you respond? What change would God's presence bring?

Zephaniah is one of the Old Testament fire, brimstone and divine destruction kind of prophets; he especially has the Levitical priesthood in his sights. John the Baptist does a very good impression of Zephaniah when he sees the Jerusalem elite, the priests and Pharisees, come to see what he is up to – 'you brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath of God?'

The crowds ask him 'what shall we do?' I wonder if their questions are filled with concerns – if the Pharisees and priests are facing judgment what will be, after all I suspect the Jerusalem elite have reminded them time again that they are the sinners. John's reply is remarkable in this world view. There is no condemnation! Instead there is a simple invitation to 'come home', to return to God, and all they have to do is be baptized; there is temple tax, no sacrifice, simply repentance!

In Zephaniah we find a similarly unexpected occurrence as the presence of God appears amongst the people of Jerusalem. Instead of judgment there is cause for celebration and joy - "Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more"

The arrival of God's presence dispels fear. It opens the door to a new future. John proclaims this too, the door is open to all if they would turn to it, if they would repent.

For both Zephaniah and John, despite the people's indifference, despite their hypocrisy, despite the cause for cosmic judgment, God's entry into the world brings celebration, restoration, and new life. But you have to turn towards that, turn away, repent.

I suspect a god who judges, casts away, brings devastation has always been easier to accept than one who comes, and instead of judgment enables restoration, healing, and forgiveness; who offers a new future. I wonder if some of this is because we can't forgive ourselves and therefore deny God that ability too. But both John and Zephaniah reveal that God comes to us precisely to restore, to forgive to offer us a chance to walk a new way. God comes to us; this is the hope of Advent!

God comes to us, God is here amongst us to forgive each of us, as well as those who have sinned against us. Here is the message of both Advent and Christmas God is present, with us, Emmanuel. In Christ God has made God's presence known! How does this make you feel? How are we to respond?

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.