

Our Sunday Service Together

Advent 4, December 22nd 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 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 Micah 5.2-4

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.
Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;

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 1.39-45

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

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

We maybe forget that Emmanuel, God with us, was reality long before the birth we celebrate at Christmas! For nine months God had been present amongst His people, hidden from sight, barely noticed and dismissed. Mary would most likely have been laughed at after she first conceived, her pregnancy would not have been noticed for months, and even when it was who would have noticed anything other than an ordinary pregnancy; where was the divine presence? All that folks would have seen was a young teenage girl, pregnant and unmarried. But then the presence and the work of God in Mary's life was noticed.

However, God's presence is recognized, but not by Elizabeth, but by her unborn son – John, who would become the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus' ministry. It is worth stopping to reflect on this for a moment, and maybe read the text once more from Luke, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb". It is an unborn child who recognizes the presence of God amongst His people, and, as John moves within her, Elizabeth is moved by the Spirit of God to declare the works of God.

In the readings we will hear through Christmas we find a constant thread, human beings are not very good at recognising God's presence with them. We look in all the wrong places - royal palaces and high places, among luxury and ease. But God is hidden in faraway, seemingly irrelevant, humbler places - in the lives of foreigners, in despised members of the community, in the smallest insignificant clan of Judah, and in spaces no one else would dare dwell within.

When we are looking for God where do we naturally look? Might it be God is with you, beside you already at work in you and the ordinariness of life? How might we, this Christmas look and find Emmanuel?

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 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 Bishops 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.