

Our Sunday Service Together

Advent 3, December 14th 2025



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 146.5-10 *We say the psalm aloud*

Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them; who keeps his promise for ever;

Who gives justice to those that suffer wrong and bread to those who hunger.

The Lord looses those that are bound; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind;

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous;

The Lord watches over the stranger in the land; he upholds the orphan and widow;

but the way of the wicked he turns upside down.

The Lord shall reign for ever, your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Alleluia.

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 35.1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

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 11.2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.' As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

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

Is John the Baptist having doubts? That would be OK if he was, as Thomas and Jesus show us after the resurrection, those questions we may have of Jesus are a core part of how we come closer to God in Christ and provide us with a better knowledge of the faith we live each day.

Is it sitting in the darkness of the prison that leaves him with his thoughts, wondering if all is lost in His campaign to see the people of Israel return to their God and live as His people? Might it be that he knows his time is up and he wants to ensure the baton is passed on to the one he came to prepare the way for.

John and Jesus are second cousins born 6 months apart. Yet John has known there is something about Jesus from before he was born. Remember, when Mary visited her cousin Elisabeth it is John who recognised Mary was carrying Jesus, the son of God.

Elisabeth gives voice to this, but it is John 'leaping' within her that bears witness to who this Jesus is. At the Jordan river, as John called the people to repentance and baptised them, turning to see Jesus he declares 'behold the lamb of God'.

Baptism is the core of John's ministry! His call to all, in every age is to embrace the fullness of this sacrament; leaving the old life and stepping out into the new, with God, empowered by the Spirit. This is not a once off event, but a daily matter of offering our souls and bodies to be living sacrifices, sent in the Spirit to live and work to the praise and glory of God. Jesus did not need baptism for the forgiveness of sin, this is why John questions Jesus when he asks for it.

It isn't for repentance that Jesus looks to be baptised, it is to publically step into his offering of himself – heart,

mind, body and soul, as a sacrifice for the work of God, to make it possible for all humanity to come back into relationship with God and with all of creation.

Where better than the Jordan river for this, the place of entry into a land of promise, of life and peace, a land that Isaiah hints at has become a wilderness, a barren place. It is no surprise really that the land is like this, for so it is with the people – for they are barren too.

John was arrested and now in prison he wonders, has Jesus honoured His baptism, is he living the kingdom purposes of God, is there fruit in the land? If he is, then John will be at peace. Go, he says to his followers and ask 'was I mistaken?', has this all been for nothing? They would have returned to John with great news, the kingdom of God is at hand, the signs that winter is over and spring is upon us are everywhere. The wilderness and the dry land John now intimately is filled with gladness, the desert is shall rejoicing and blossoming; and there is rejoicing, joy and singing.

We don't hear in our readings today of John's execution, but I am sure that the reports brought back to him of Jesus stirred his heart, filled him with a hope that gave him the resolve to stand as he did before Herod and, in true prophet mode, declare Herod's bankrupt heart and lifestyle, expose the wider failures of his rule which was for his own self worshipping, money driven, corrupt existence.

At times there is much darkness in the soul of humanity! There is a wilderness in society where lions prowl, set to devour all before them. There is a bankrupt, self-centred, godless spirit at work; but be of cheer and hope.

Our call, in Christ is to be of cheer and hope, and to stand firm in your baptism, set your face against the darkness for the light has come and thought they tried to put that light out, and still do, the truth is 'the night is passed and the day lies open before us'. Step into that dawn each day, robe yourself with Christ, and 'offer your souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice, sent in the power of the Spirit, to live and work for his praise and glory'.

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 Cambodia and Thailand, 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.