

Our Sunday Service Together

Advent 4, December 21st 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 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 Isaiah 7.10-16

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

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 1.18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

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

Having visited Mary and heard her say to God's proposal, 'may it be as the Lord has said'; and the Holy Spirit has 'hovered' over her to bring the Lord's will to bear, the angel now pays a visit to Joseph. Joseph may not be a part of the conception, however he is still Mary's intended, and both she and the baby will need him present, alongside them – with them. Unlike with Mary, who is fully awake during her visitation, for Joseph all happens whilst asleep, in his dreams. God, it seems has various ways of getting His messages to us. Looking to both Mary and Joseph I wonder if the important thing is to listen and act on God's revelation to us.

In Joseph's dream the angel says what is happening is promised of old to Israel – as the prophet said, the angel says. The hope of the centuries is being fulfilled, Immanuel will be born amongst humanity as 'God with us' and our confidence is ever able to rest in the greatest of all promises; God with us, amongst us, one with us!

But to fulfil the long hoped for promise God required a young woman to run with His vision. Mary made space in her womb for this to happen, just like Joseph of Aramathea later would offer the space of his tomb; and both bring forth life. Without the co-operation of human beings in the purposes of God, God has allowed himself to be limited in what he can do.

God is with us each and all days. Jesus, as he ascended, promised to be with us all until the end of the age. In our liturgy we acknowledge this reality 'the Lord is here, His Spirit is with us' we say. Each day the Lord comes seeking space within which to work His promises. What a responsibility rests on every believer every day! Like Mary, Joseph her betrothed, Joseph of Aramathea, we are co-operative agents of God's loving action in the world. Saying 'yes' is a daily decision. Offering our souls and bodies to be living sacrifices, sent in the power of the Spirit is a daily calling. How might we say 'yes' today?

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 Bishop Michael 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.