

The Lord be with you:

and also with you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

as we gather we must recall the promises and warnings given to us in the Scriptures. Let us therefore examine ourselves and repent of our sins.

Father God, we confess that we often take the gifts of your creation for granted, and use them chiefly to further our own interests:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Saviour Christ, we confess that we often give in to the selfish desires of our hearts, and the uncaring ways of the world.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, we confess that we often close our minds to your influence, and fail to bear good fruits in our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution May God our Father forgive us our sins,
and bring us to the fellowship of his table with his saints for ever. **Amen.**

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 [The Good News of Deliverance]

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me;

he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God;

to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations;

they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing;

I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples;

all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,

so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

This is the word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

Psalms 126 Listen to a few verses of today's psalm as John Shera plays.

John 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord', as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

Why do we read that passage from Isaiah? It's towards the end of that long prophecy, formed over a couple of hundred years by at least three writers? It's significance lies in two things:

First, its message, which is one of hope, of vindication and freedom for the returned Israelites after their exile in Babylon – it's about a day of Jubilees – it's about a new start, a clearing-out of old things.

But secondly, we know it perhaps only vaguely, as a passage which Jesus read out in the synagogue in Nazareth. It was his first public act, so it is seen as Jesus' mission statement for his time on earth. You know it well; it's from the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me ..." I've always been in awe of this, because it is so grounded in what we Christians should be: what our guiding light should be: what we ought to do as Christians.

We get a glimpse of the same anointing – that same action of God's power - in John's Gospel, and if we think about it, the message is the same as that of Isaiah: for this too is a message about a new start. A new start at an inauspicious time, in an Israel overthrown by the power of Rome. This man, John the Baptist, was sent by God to bring hope. "He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all may believe through him."

To me, the kernel of this passage is another verse: "Among you stands one whom you do not know ..." And then the evangelist uses his dramatic storytelling power to reveal another layer of his intent: he has John the Baptist say to some Levites and priests: "I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." And in case we haven't taken the unspoken intent of the gospel writer, we're told that "he came as a witness to testify to the light. He himself was not the light. What's left unstated is the obvious subject of this "light".

Well, that's clear, isn't it? But what a witness John turned out to be! And what a message to the downtrodden Jews of that time: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the Lord'". If I jump back into Isaiah, it's not to make an easy reference; but listen if you will to the emotional similarity: "for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness ... for as the earth brings forth its shoots ... so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations."

"All the nations". All of us. All we are asked is to take seriously what this Jewish heritage, this Jewish history, this Jewish belief is pouring forth from this short text. And John the Evangelist finishes with this expansive summing-up: "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". "Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down!" This is the season of the Coming! – the coming of Christ into our world.

And now to God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,

God from God, Light from Light,

true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. **Amen.**

Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the 3rd Sunday of Advent

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you:
Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.

Amen.

For light to know and to follow the truth, let us pray to the Lord. Make the Church a powerful witness to the
light that has come into the world. Through the preaching of the Word, and through the water of baptism, may
God's people be gathered into one body. *... hear our prayer*
Grant that the messengers of God may be heard throughout the world. Where material wealth and comfort
abound in a spiritual wilderness, bring the light which reveals the true joy of living. *... hear our prayer*
Make us messengers of the Gospel in our daily lives, and give strength to all in our community who labour to
make known the mighty works of God *... hear our prayer*
Have mercy on all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Our prayer is especially for all who have been struck by
COVID-19, whether personally or through their families and friends; those for whom the virus has left them
distressed; those for whom the brightness of life has been dimmed by fear. May the light of hope shine through
their darkness and give them comfort. *... hear our prayer*
We give thanks for the departed who were cleansed by the waters of baptism and have passed over the great
water to eternal life. May they rest in peace and may light perpetual shine upon them. *... hear our prayer*
Amen.

Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us
therefore let us celebrate the feast.

The Lord is here.
His Spirit is with us.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

All glory and honour, thanks and praise be given to you at all times and in all places, Lord, holy Father, true and
living God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
For he is your eternal Word through whom you have created all things from the beginning and formed us in
your own image.
In your great love you gave him to be made man for us and to share our common life. In obedience to your will
your Son our Saviour offered himself as a perfect sacrifice, and died on the cross for our redemption.
Through him you have freed us from the slavery of sin and reconciled us to yourself, our God and Father. He is
our great high priest whom you raised from death and exalted to your right hand on high where he ever lives
to intercede for us.
Through him you have sent upon us your holy and life-giving Spirit and made us a royal priesthood called to
serve you for ever.
Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we proclaim your great and glorious
name, for ever praising you and saying:
Holy, holy, holy Lord,

**God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful Father, we thank you

for these gifts of your creation, this bread and this wine, and we pray that we who eat and drink them in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in obedience to our Saviour Christ in remembrance of his death and passion may be partakers of his body and his blood, who on the night he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you; Do this in remembrance of me.

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. Father, with this bread and this cup, we do as our Saviour has commanded:

we celebrate the redemption he has won for us;

we proclaim his perfect sacrifice, made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension; and we look for his coming to fulfil all things according to your will.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son, and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom and in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father almighty, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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 Breaking of the Bread

The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

We being many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.

Almighty God,

we thank you for feeding us

with the spiritual food

of the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies

to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit

to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

Dismissal:

Strengthen for service, Lord,

the hands that holy things have taken;

may the ears that have heard your word be deaf to clamour and dispute;

may the tongues which have sung your praise be free from deceit;

may the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love shine with the light of hope;

and may the bodies which have been fed with your body

be refreshed with the fulness of your life;

and the blessing of God Almighty,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be with you and remain with you always.

Amen.