

Morning Prayer 12th December 2021

3rd Sunday in Advent

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM
OF CHURCHES



Preparation

O Lord, open our lips

All **and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**

Reveal among us the light of your presence

All **that we may behold your power and glory.**

Blessed are you, Sovereign God of all,
to you be praise and glory for ever.

In your tender compassion

the dawn from on high is breaking upon us
to dispel the lingering shadows of night.

As we look for your coming among us this day,
open our eyes to behold your presence
and strengthen our hands to do your will,
that the world may rejoice and give you praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All **Blessed be God for ever.**

Hymn

1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
come then and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings!

2 Then cleansed be every Christian breast,
and furnished for so great a guest.
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

- 3 For thou art our salvation, Lord,
our refuge, and our great reward;
without thy grace our souls must fade
and wither like a flower decayed.
- 4 Stretch forth thine hand, to heal our sore,
and make us rise to fall no more;
once more upon thy people shine,
and fill the world with love divine.
- 5 All praise, eternal Son, to thee
whose advent sets thy people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore,
and Spirit bless, for evermore.

Jordanis oras praevia Charles Coffin (1676-1749)
Translated John Chandler (1806-1876)

Confession

A voice cries out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord.'
So let us listen, and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.
cf John 1.23

**All Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing
and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.** *cf Psalm 51*

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse *us* from *our* sins,

and restore *us* in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Lighting the Advent candle

Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, just and true:
to you be praise and glory for ever.
Your prophet John the Baptist was witness to the truth
as a burning and shining light.
May we your servants rejoice in his light,
and so be led to witness to him
who is the Lord of our coming kingdom,
Jesus our Saviour and King of the ages.

All Blessed be God for ever.

Canticle

We will meditate on 'A Song of the Wilderness.'

**All Lift up your voice with strength,
O herald of good tidings.**

¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall rejoice,
All the desert shall blossom and burst into song.

² They shall see the glory of the Lord,
All the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weary hands,
All and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to the anxious, 'Be strong, fear not,
your God is coming with judgement,
All coming with judgement to save you.'

⁵ Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened,
All and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ Then shall the lame leap like a hart,
All **and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.**

⁷ For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
All **and streams in the desert;**

⁸ The ransomed of the Lord shall return with singing,
All **with everlasting joy upon their heads.**

⁹ Joy and gladness shall be theirs,
All **and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**

Isaiah 35.1,2b-4a,4c-6,10

All **Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

All **Lift up your voice with strength,
O herald of good tidings.**

Let us meditate for 1 minute on verse 4. How do we perceive God's gracious forgiveness in this verse?

Scripture readings

Philippians 4.4-7

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Luke 3:7-18. 'John the Baptist prepares the way'

⁷ 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? ⁸Bear 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. ⁹Even 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?' ¹¹In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' ¹²Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' ¹³He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' ¹⁴Soldiers 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, ¹⁶John 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. ¹⁷His 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.

Sermon by Dagmar, The Bishop of Huntingdon,

Dee, dee dee ... ("Don't worry, be happy!" Hit by Bobby McFerrin 1988) Or is the soundtrack for you from Purcell: "Rejoice in the Lord alway!"

Rejoice! writes Paul in the Epistle to the Philippians. Gaudete Sunday, Rejoicing Sunday: having passed the midpoint of Advent, the mood lightens a little, and I *could* even be wearing pink vestments to mark the occasion! Sometimes a pink candle is lit as the third candle (no, it's not the fourth one, pink for Mary as some think, that is a rather more [dare I say sexist] modern idea of pink for girls!).

So to cheer us all up, we have John the Baptist preaching: *You brood of vipers!*

If this is John's idea of good news, I'm not sure I want to hear the bad news ...

Our readings this week and last focus on John's preaching: a fire-and-brimstone prophet, announcing God's judgment, calling for repentance, and heralding the coming Messiah. All in all, it's a pretty sobering message, beginning with the less-than-endearing "You brood of vipers..." and ending with the no less ominous "...and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

And gospelwriter Luke has the gall to say just after the end of this Sunday's Gospel: "So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the **good** news to the people." ??? How is this good news?

When we already feel battle-worn, maybe losing hope with the state of the world as it is, maybe losing confidence in the faith we are called to proclaim, maybe wondering whether all this Deanery Development stuff is going anywhere anyway ...

It is important to note that Paul does not write "rejoice" to others from a comfortable armchair. Rather, at time of writing he himself is in prison for his faith. The Christian faith is not about pontificating about the joy those in despair should be feeling, if only they believed properly! The joy Paul speaks about is not the absence of trouble but the presence of Christ. As Christ is close to those who are in despair, they may discover such joy themselves. Rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near.

Our joy in this world is an affirmation of Christ's resurrection and this does not deny the crucifixion. Therefore it is not wrong to rejoice even while elsewhere people are suffering. In a sense such joy only affirms that what is going on in, say, Yemen or Sudan or the border of Europe, is not right. The resurrection is a protest against this.

Paul is writing not to an individual but to a community of Christians. Not an ideal community. There have been and there are problems. People being people, they don't get on from time to time and the same in Philippi. Yes, although they were Christians. Paul mentions two women who have struggled beside him and have done wonderful work of the gospel with him and others. Yet now, there is some sort of conflict between them. Unlike us so often, Paul doesn't pretend it isn't happening but having urged them to get themselves sorted out, he affirms them as Christian people whose names are in the book of life. He deals with their present problems which must have had some roots in the past, by looking to the future. THEN, immediately, our reading begins and he says: Rejoice.

So we see how Paul's direction of thinking is from the future of God. Invent the future from the future is one of those slogans which actually fits well here. Don't get stuck in the limitations of the past and the here and now but reach out for God's future. I think this is what Bishop Stephen means when he speaks of developing godly ambition for our churches. No one can take away the looking-forward kind of joy. It is this dream of God's future that through the ages has inspired people even in great adversity and oppression to stand up for what God stands for. Not looking back to some 'Golden Age' that maybe never was anyway, pretending that that's where we need to return to, but looking ahead to our home with God in the future. It is this that has led displaced campesinos in Latin America to pray to *God our promised land, Your spirit urges us towards a joyous homecoming*. It is this that has allowed Paul to write about joy while he was in prison.

But back to John the Baptists disturbing call: he is challenging people about the outworking of their faith.

There is one little question that recurs in our passage. It's this: on hearing John's message, a variety of people ask "what should we do?"

They are all asking:

- the crowds (in Luke's Gospel this does mean the poor people),
- the tax-collectors (that means the collaborators with the hated Roman occupiers),
- the soldiers (don't think patriotic army, this means mercenaries).

And John has a very simple message for them. It's not difficult to understand, it's not holier than thou pious waffle.

- the crowds (the poor people): share the little you have
- the tax-collectors (the collaborators): take only what is fair
- the mercenaries: don't practice extortion, don't threaten people.

The good news in that it is all within reach, it's doable. This is what the Prophet Micah said what the Lord requires: act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

John the Baptist is in that prophetic tradition, not interested in a religious veneer to life but challenging people about the real deal of God.

People are not all expected to become "religious", abstain from anything that's vaguely fun and lead a monastic life. They are asked to get on with their lives but in such a way that they think of others because they live within the framework of God's presence, a divine presence that actually means something. So there is a sense of our whole lives being a prayer in that our whole lives relate to God.

John the Baptist invites all people, including those seen as morally dodgy, he tells them they are all God's children, he invites them, to put it into faith jargon, to participate in the coming Kingdom of God, wherever they are. They have a purpose in life. Because God is present in the ordinary and mundane elements of our lives: this, of course, is part of the Christmas message of the baby in the cradle.

Brothers and sisters, if you feel your confidence failing, remember God is faithful. And remember what we all together were able to achieve when the odds were stacked against us, when we could not meet for worship due to lockdown, when people felt isolated: we were rightly

convinced it was for us to respond, and we responded to the call: when we put our minds to it and worked together, we managed to get the whole Diocese, the whole CofE onto the internet. In 2 weeks! Where we did not have the know-how, we went out and sought partners and got it. We created community hubs and enhanced our foodbanks, we made phone calls to those not online - we worked together. When we believe something is important, when we believe in the cause, we can do it!

The Christian faith is an immeasurable treasure for each of us personally, for our communities, for our country. We have every reason to rejoice in the God we know in Jesus Christ – who challenges us hugely, and who loves us more than we can fathom.

This advent, we are called to persistent faithfulness as we await Jesus' coming.

There's no excuse that the Christian faith beyond Sundays is just for special people, people who are "religious". No, it includes you and me, being a child of God, being part of that great worldwide community, building God's kingdom right where we are, having a wonderful liberating purpose in life.

Our faith doesn't have to be heroic, our Christmas celebrations won't have to be ideal, we don't have to be perfect in order to practice faithfulness.

We may even be going through truly tough times.

The joy Paul speaks about is not the absence of trouble but the presence of Christ. And that's assured, it's the reason for the season. So: Gaudete! And again I say: rejoice!

Thanks be to God.

Apostle's Creed

**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 of Intercession Led by John Crang

God bless this shire,
and keep our fists from ire,
lest we fall apart.

God bless the hearth,
the kitchen and the garth*,
that we may rest.

God bless the city
with justice and with pity,
lest we seek to blame.

God bless the towns,
the festivals and clowns,
that we may laugh.

God bless the village,
the grazing and the tillage,
lest we cease to care.

God bless this place
with presence, silence, grace,
that we may pray.

God bless these days
of rough and narrow ways,
lest we despair.

God bless the night
and calm our trembling fright,
that we may love.

God bless this land
and guide us with your hand
lest we be unjust.

God bless the earth
through pangs of death and birth,
and make us whole.

Merciful Father...

Bidding prayers by Jim Cotter, *Out of Silence...Into Silence*. Prayer's Daily Round

** - a yard or garden.*

The Collect

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
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

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.**

Conclusion

Hymn

I Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

- 2 Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.
- 3 Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
- 4 By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

May God the Father, judge all-merciful,
make us worthy of a place in his kingdom.

All **Amen.**

May God the Son, coming among us in power,
reveal in our midst the promise of his glory.

All **Amen.**

May God the Holy Spirit make us steadfast in faith,
joyful in hope and constant in love.

All **Amen.**

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always.

All **Amen.**

As we await our coming Saviour,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**