

Holy Communion
Advent 3 - 13th December 2020

The Gathering

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Come, thou long-expected Jesus

- 1 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)

The Greeting

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

Prayer of Preparation

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Invitation to 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. *John 1.23*

Silence is kept

**Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love
and marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed,
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light. Amen.**

The president says

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

The president introduces a period of silent prayer with the words 'Let us pray'.

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.**

Gospel Reading

Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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.

John 1.6-8, 19-28

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

'In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.'

The reading for this third Sunday of Advent focusses on John the Baptist. I wonder what you heard?

There are two things I want to consider. The first is the light and that John is a witness to this light, and the second, John's rather elusive and intriguing response when questioned about who he was by the Jewish authorities. For me, this passage is sizzling with significance and is both profound and powerful.

So firstly, concerning the Light and John's witness. This passage is part of the Gospel writer's introduction, and is so unlike the other gospels, with no mention of a manger, angels, shepherds and kings. Instead the writer gets right to the heart of the mystery and wonder of who God is in Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. The God *beyond* time is becoming God *in* time; the cosmic and eternal reality of God becomes the incarnate and temporal; the distant, unreachable, 'out of this worldness' of God becomes wedded to the concrete, earthly and human; divinity is united with humanity; the Word becomes flesh. This is *the most* decisive event in human history, because the relationship between divine and human is transformed. Through Jesus Christ, God lovingly chose to pour Himself into the mess, confusion and pain of humanity.....into an intimate relationship with each one of us. God became flesh to share in the joys and the pain, suffering, loss, grief and even death of humankind. Breath-taking.

The Light came to shine in our darkness, and **John** was the witness to this Light.

And so, to John and his intriguing response to the question: 'who are you?' 'I am not the Messiah' he replied. 'Are you Elijah?' they asked. 'I am not' he answered. 'Are you the Prophet?' He replied, 'No.' John's three responses: 'I am not the Messiah.....I am not.....no.' Denial, denial, denial. The Pharisees missed the point. They wanted to know who John was, but John wanted nothing other than to prepare them to recognise who Jesus was. John pointed beyond himself.....to Jesus. By denying any claim to independent

identity, John precisely affirms his dependence on Jesus. 'I am not the Messiah.....I am not.....no.' What fills John with joy is not his own life, but Jesus'. John is not fixated on self, status, wealth, achievement, recognition and success. Instead John gives Himself up to self-abandonment and self-emptying in honour of, and to point to, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. John gave up any notion of 'it's all about me' so that he could open himself up to, and give space for, the love and presence of God and God's action within. John died to self to be a witness to the Light.

John the Baptist's last words recorded in John's Gospel in chapter 3 powerfully testify to this. Speaking of Jesus Christ, he says, 'He must become greater, I must become less.' These words echo those of St Paul's in his letter to the Galatians 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' Perhaps it is no wonder that in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus says 'there is no one greater than John.'

John was not the light. John denied self to witness to the Light, the Light who gives Himself to you and to me. The Light of the World. Our Saviour Jesus Christ. May we too, deny ourselves and become living and loving witnesses to this light, so that all may believe and have life.

Amen

Music for reflection

Please sit or kneel

Prayers of Intercession

In joyful expectation of his coming we pray to Jesus.

Come to your Church as Lord and judge.

We pray for our Diocese of York and for all the support and encouragement we have been given during this pandemic.

We pray that we may wait for your coming with patience.

Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your kingdom.

Maranatha: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your world as King of the nations.

We pray for our world at this time, for those who are waiting for peace, for food, for a home, for security, for someone to care.

We give thanks to the scientists who have produced vaccines that are going to be available to us in the coming months.

Before you rulers will stand in silence and wait.

Maranatha: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to our communities, as a shepherd who cares.

We pray for local schools, for all members of the staff, for the care they give to our young people.

This has been a difficult year for all, we pray for our own families and friends, for those who have been there for us when needed.

Maranatha: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to the suffering as Saviour and comforter.

We pray for those we know who are sick, those in hospital, those who live in our care homes, those we know who are in need of prayer today.

Break into our lives, where we struggle with sickness and distress, and set us free to serve you for ever.

Maranatha: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to us as shepherd and guardian of our souls.

We pray for those we have loved but see no more.

Give us with all the faithful departed a share in your victory over evil and death.

Maranatha: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come from heaven, Lord Jesus, with power and great glory.

Lift us up to meet you, that with all your saints and angels we may live and reign with you in your new creation.

Maranatha: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Silence is kept.

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay; give new courage to your people, who trust in your love.

By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of your kingdom on earth as in heaven, where you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit, one God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

The Peace

In the tender mercy of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you.

Preparation of the Table Taking of the Bread and Wine

Look upon us in mercy not in judgement;
draw us from hatred to love;
make the frailty of our praise
a dwelling place for your glory. **Amen**

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good to give you thanks and praise,
almighty God and everlasting Father,
through Jesus Christ your Son.

For when he humbled himself to come among us in human flesh,
he fulfilled the plan you formed before the foundation of the world to open for us the
way of salvation.

Confident that your promise will be fulfilled,
we now watch for the day
when Christ our Lord will come again in glory.

And so we join our voices with angels and archangels and with all the company of
heaven to proclaim your glory 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.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink 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.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice
made once for all upon the cross.
Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

**Christ has died:
Christ is risen:
Christ will come again.**

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.
Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.
Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:
**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.
**Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**Jesus, Lamb of God,
have mercy on us.**

**Jesus, bearer of our sins,
have mercy on us.**

**Jesus, redeemer of the world,
grant us peace.**

Giving of Communion

Jesus is the Lamb of God
who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those who are called to his supper.
**Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word, and I shall be healed.**

The president and people receive communion.

Prayer after Communion

Silence is kept.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts;
kindle in us the fire of your Spirit
that when your Christ comes again
we may shine as lights before his face;
who is alive and reigns now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Dismissal

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path,
and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and those whom you love and pray for,
now and forever. **Amen.**

As we await our coming Saviour,
go in the peace of Christ.
Thanks be to God.

Blessing