



**ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF WANGARATTA**

**The Parochial District of  
Wangaratta West and The Warbys**

**Third Sunday of Advent  
17th December 2023**



**Ante Communion,  
11.00a.m.**



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Direct Debit: Parish of Wangaratta West & Warbys

A/c No. 126778711. BSB 633 108

## GATHERING IN GOD'S NAME

### *The Welcome & Greeting*

This is the day that the Lord has made,  
**we will rejoice and be glad in it.**

### *The Acclamation*

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel:  
**He has come to his people and set them free.**

He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour:  
**born of the house of his servant David.**

In the tender compassion 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.**

**Opening Hymn:** *The Song of Zechariah (Benedictus)*. tune Blaenwern.

1. Bless the Lord, the God of Israel,  
who has come to set us free.  
He has raised for us a Saviour  
sprung from royal David's tree.  
Through his prophets God had spoken  
of the hope the Christ would bring;  
of his faithfulness and mercy  
let each generation sing.
2. Long ago God made a promise  
he would set his people free,  
that in all our life and worship  
we might know true liberty,  
to be holy, to be righteous  
in his sight throughout our days;  
now this child will be a herald  
making ready all God's ways.
3. Let all people know salvation  
through forgiveness of their sin,  
as our God in his compassion  
bids a shining dawn begin.

So may all who dwell in darkness  
see the shadows disappear  
while he guides our feet in pathways  
where his peace is ever near.

Anne Harrison (b. 1954)  
based on Luke 1.68-79 (Benedictus, The Song of Zechariah)

Let us pray

**Gracious God,  
we humbly thank you for life and health and safety,  
for freedom to work, leisure to rest,  
and for all that is beautiful in creation  
and human life.  
But, above all, we praise you for our Saviour,  
Jesus Christ,  
for his death and resurrection;  
for the gift of your Spirit;  
and for the hope of sharing in your glory.  
Fill our hearts with all joy and peace in believing;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*The Minister says*

The Lord is coming!  
Prepare his way:

**The Lord is coming!  
We are making ready.**

As we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Christ's love let us  
look within, search our hearts and seek God's healing grace.

*A moment or two of quiet thought*

*The Confession*

**Holy and forgiving God,  
we have sinned against you and each other  
in thought and word and deed.  
We have turned from your life-giving word,  
and ignored the message of those you sent.  
We are unprepared for the coming of your Son.  
Have mercy upon us and forgive us,  
that strengthened by your love  
we may serve you more faithfully;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*The minister stands and declares God's forgiveness*

God desires that none should perish,  
but that all should turn to Christ, and live.  
In response to his call we acknowledge our sins.  
God pardons those who humbly repent,  
and truly believe the gospel.  
Therefore we have peace with God,  
through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

### THE ADVENT CANDLES

#### **Advent 3 – John the Baptist**

Jesus said, 'No one more important than John the Baptist has ever been born; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'

**Amen. Come soon, Lord Jesus!**

*The third candle is lit and this response is used*

Jesus is the light of the world.

**A light no darkness can ever put out.**

*We sing:*

Advent candles tell their story  
as we watch and pray,  
longing for the Day of Glory,  
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.  
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness  
changed for gladness on that Day.

John the Baptist, by his preaching  
and by water poured,  
brought to those who heard his teaching  
news of hope restored:  
'Keep your vision strong and steady,  
and be ready  
for the Lord.'

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*The Collect is said or sung*

O God, most high and most near,  
you send glad tidings to the lowly,  
you hide not your face from the poor;  
those who dwell in darkness you call into the light.

Take away our blindness,  
remove the hardness of our hearts,  
and form us into a humble people,  
that, at the advent of your Son,  
we may recognise him in our midst  
and find joy in his saving presence.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain,  
whose day draws near:  
your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

#### THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

#### **A Reading from the prophecy of Isaiah [61. 1-4, 8-11]**

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.

Hear the word of the Lord,  
**thanks be to God.**

Psalm is said: Left side, Right side. All together

## **Psalm 126**

When the Lord turned again the fortunes of Zion:  
**then were we like those restored to life.**

Then was our mouth filled with laughter:  
**and our tongue with singing.**

Then said they among the heathen:  
**‘The Lord has done great things for them.’**

*Truly the Lord has done great things for us:  
and therefore we rejoiced.*

Turn again our fortunes, O Lord:  
**as the streams return to the dry south.**

Those who sow in tears:  
**shall reap with songs of joy.**

*They that go out weeping, bearing the seed:  
shall come again in gladness,  
bringing their sheaves with them.*

**A Reading from the 1st Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians [5. 12-28]**

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Beloved, pray for us.

Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Hear the word of the Lord,  
**thanks be to God.**

**Gradual Hymn:** AHB 199/TiS 270. tune, Winchester New.

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 heart from sin;  
make straight the way for God within;  
prepare we in our hearts a home  
where such a mighty guest may come.
3. For you are our salvation, Lord,  
our refuge and our great reward;  
without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.

4. To heal the sick stretch out your hand,  
and bid the fallen sinner stand;  
shine forth, and let your light restore  
earth's own true loveliness once more.
5. To him who left the throne of heaven  
to free us all, let praise be given;  
and praise be to the Father done,  
and Holy Spirit, Three in One.

Charles Coffin 1676–1749  
*tr.* John Chandler 1806–76 *alt.*

The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to John [1. 6-8, 19-28]

### **Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

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.

For the Gospel of the Lord,  
**praise to you Lord Jesus Christ**

*reflection*



*Affirmation of Faith*

*Please stand*

We say together in faith

**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come.**

We believe in God the Father, who created all things:

**for by his will they were created  
and have their being.**

We believe in God the Son, who was slain:

**for with his blood, he purchased us for God,  
from every tribe and language,  
from every people and nation.**

We believe in God the Holy Spirit:

**the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'  
Even so come, Lord Jesus!  
Amen.**

*cf Revelation 4.8,11; 5.9; 22.17, 20*

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

O God, for whom we wait and long,  
we bring to you our prayers for your world and for your church.

Promise of righteousness, come.

Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless and hear the cries of all who  
plead for justice.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of freedom, come.

Bring good news of release to the oppressed, free those in chains  
of misery and despair.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of peace, come.

Heal ancient feuds and hatreds and deliver your people from the  
horrors of war.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of forgiveness, come.

Look with mercy on our wrongdoings and help us to turn from our sinful ways.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of salvation, come.

Remember your people, according to your ancient promises, and send your Messiah.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of love, come.

Hold in your tender embrace all who are lonely, friendless, forgotten, rejected.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of comfort, come.

Bring the balm of your presence to all who know pain, anguish, sorrow or grief.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of hope, come.

Let us see that the time of your coming is near and keep us watchful for your return.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Promise of glory, come.

Draw your saints, in this world and the next, into the light of your eternal presence.

Come, O God for whom we wait and long, and, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Accept our prayers though Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to 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.**

**Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now  
and for ever. Amen.**

**Offertory Hymn:** AHB 193/TiS 265. tune, Veni Emmanuel.

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.  
*Rejoice! rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*
2. O come, O come, great Lord of might  
who to the tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times did give the law  
in cloud and majesty and awe.  
*Rejoice! rejoice! ...*
3. O come, O key of David, come,  
and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high  
and close the path to misery.  
*Rejoice! rejoice! ...*
4. O come, O branch of Jesse, free  
your own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell your people save  
and give them victory o'er the grave.  
*Rejoice! rejoice! ...*
5. O come, O dayspring, come and cheer  
our spirits by your advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.  
*Rejoice! rejoice!*

Anon., Latin, 18th cent. or earlier  
based on Antiphons from 9th cent. or earlier  
tr. John Mason Neale 1818-66 alt.

*At the presentation of the Offering, this prayer may be said*

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.  
Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.

Accept and use our offerings for your glory  
and for the service of your kingdom.

**Blessed be God for ever.**

### THE GREETING OF PEACE

Dear friends, while you are waiting for the day of God,  
strive to be found at peace by him.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

*All may exchange a sign of peace*

*Notices may be given at this point.*

**Concluding Hymn: Colours of Day (Light Up the Fire)**

1. Colours of day dawn into the mind,  
The sun has come up, the night is behind.  
Go down in the city, into the street,  
And let's give the message to the people we meet.

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,  
Open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow,  
Tell the people of Jesus, let His love show.*

2. Go through the park, on into the town;  
The sun still shines on, it never goes down.  
The light of the world is risen again;  
The people of darkness are needing a friend.

*So light up the fire . . .*

3. Open your eyes, look into the sky,  
The darkness has come, the Son came to die.  
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,  
But Jesus is living, His Spirit is near.

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,  
Open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow,  
Tell the people of Jesus, let His love show.*

Sue McClellan, John Paculabo and Keith Rycroft

### *Concluding prayer*

Eternal God and Father,  
**by whose power we are created,  
and by whose love we are redeemed:  
Guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,  
that we may give ourselves to your service,  
and live this day in love to one another and to you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### *The Grace*

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all. Amen.**

### *The Dismissal*

**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:  
in the name of Christ. Amen.**

The resources used in this order of service are: A Prayer Book for Australia.  
Confession from The Methodist Worship Book (GB) 1999.  
Prayers of the People from Prayers of the People are from Let Us Pray © 1999 Janet Nelson.  
Common Worship (Church of England): Thanksgiving Prayer F & After Communion prayer.  
Permission granted by The Ordinary for use in the parish in Advent 2023.

## ***The Third Sunday of Advent***

So at last, after weeks of foreboding, of warnings that the coming of the Lord is not something to take lightly or to meet with unprepared, now at last the excitement begins to mount.

First of all there is John. You could read his self-description as humble and self-effacing, but I'm not sure that it is. It rings with certainty. John knows exactly what he is and what he is not. He knows that he is a necessary part of God's unfolding plan, the first actor on the stage, the narrator who sets the scene and lets us know what is to come. There is barely suppressed excitement in his voice as he scans the crowd, waiting for the face that he knows he—and only he—will recognize. He does not mind that his work will be eclipsed. He understands the job of the herald, both its importance and that it is necessarily transitory. He has no hesitation in applying the words of scripture to himself. He knows that the prophets foretold his coming, and longed to see what he is about to see. John is hugely content to be where he is and what he is. Any part in God's coming is vital.

As soon as John opens his mouth, he brings with him the whole cloud of prophetic witness to what God has been preparing for so long. And although the readings of the last few weeks have reminded us that not everyone will be pleased to see God, or thrilled by what he has prepared for the world, today's reading from Isaiah is full of joy. It is a joy that John would have recognized and identified with, because it is the joy of the one whose news is for others. The joy of the anointed one is in seeing the faces of the oppressed, the captive, the bereaved as they hear the good news he brings. But even this, enormous as it is, is secondary. The real, uncontainable, wild excitement comes in Isaiah 61:10 and 11. The good news that the anointed one brings is the news that, at last, the earth is to see the full nature and glory of God. Righteousness, salvation, justice and praise spring up all over the earth because now, finally, we see what God is like. Just as a garden cannot help growing what is planted in it, so the world cannot help but respond to the righteousness of God.

Does Thessalonians sound a little tame after Isaiah? It shouldn't. The Thessalonians are enjoying what the prophets longed for and John pointed to. And they know it, or if they don't, it's not Paul's fault. Paul is perfectly clear that joy is the natural condition of Christians, quite independent of the

outward circumstances. Joy is the gift of the unquenchable Spirit, whose job it is to keep Christians connected at all times to the life of God, offered in Christ. It is the same bubbling spring of excitement found in John the Baptist and in Isaiah, the welling joy of those who have seen the nature of God, and the unfolding of his work. It is, perhaps, a reflection of the joy of God himself, looking on what he made and seeing its loveliness. Now the things that he has made can look at him, making again, recreating, and marvel at the beauty of the creator.

*The Shepherd of Hermas*, which was written in the second century and widely read and pondered on for generations, says: 'Put sadness away from you, for truly sadness is the sister of half-heartedness and bitterness ... he that is sad always does wickedly, first because he makes sad the Holy Spirit that has been given to man for joy, and secondly he works lawlessness, in that he neither prays to God nor gives him thanks.'<sup>1</sup>

He might have been echoing Paul. This joy is not dependent upon prosperity, health, luck or anything external. It is based on the extraordinary gift that God the Spirit gives us, of being part of the life and work of God. So, like most of God's gifts, it has a purpose. In joy, we turn to the world God has made, and we become his heralds. Like John the Baptist, we shout aloud about the coming of Christ, who will bring joy to those who have never experienced it before in the whole of their lives. We shout about the faithfulness of God, creator, redeemer and bringer of joy. How extraordinary that Thessalonians says that the basis of our faithfulness to God is joy, and that to fulfil God's law we need to rejoice at what he has done. Now that really might get us into the Christmas Spirit.

*Jane Williams. (2005). Lectionary Reflections: Year B (p. 6). SPCK.*

### **The Third Sunday of Advent**

Restrain the impulse towards Isaiah's rolling cadences and John's pregnant simplicity, and ponder what Paul has packed into such a small space. Apart from verse 23 (a benediction for those awaiting the Lord's presence), the rest of this nine-verse passage is very clipped. No argument; no discourse; only one explanatory phrase; eight commands; a concluding promise. Forty-one words in the Greek, just over five per verse. Blessed is the one who ponders each, and the way in which they bring the Advent hope into present reality.

First, celebration. 'Rejoice always'; easy to caricature, but easy too to miss the point. Present celebration is rooted in what has already been achieved in Christ, and what is thereby guaranteed.

Second, ceaseless prayer. Easier said than done, we think, and settle for less than one hour in 24; yet Paul was busy too, had much to be anxious about, and could still speak of anticipating here and now the life of heaven.

Gratitude in all circumstances: Paul's were more trying than most, yet one hint of trouble and we back off, despite his interesting explanation.

Gratitude, it seems, is at the heart of the genuine humanness not only modelled but given to us in Christ; it is, again, a key sign of living in the present in the light of the promised future. These first three commands, like the opening clauses in the Lord's Prayer, are all about looking to God and God's future.

We then have two commands to be open to fresh winds of the Spirit: don't quench the Spirit, don't despise prophesying. New wine is inconvenient in church, embarrassing even; but unless God is doing new things how can we be living as future-oriented people?

Finally, three commands to serious moral decisions.

Test everything; cling tight to what is good (if you don't, it'll slip out of your fingers); back off from everything that even looks evil. God's future judgement is to work forwards into appropriate moral seriousness. Again, there are echoes of the Lord's Prayer. Was this, perhaps, the kind of quick teaching Paul would give his converts at a very basic stage? Have we improved on it?

Finally, the promise: he who calls you is faithful, and will accomplish it.

A beloved aunt wrote the first three Greek words, *pistos ho kalon*, on a card for my confirmation, and I have it still, all these years later. The future assured action of the Lord undergirds the future-oriented behaviour of the disciple. Like John the Baptist, so preoccupied with what (and who) was coming that all he could do was to point away from himself and towards God's future, we are to pray, dance, and be holy, for tomorrow we live.

Now place this brief picture of Christian behaviour within the majestic promises and flights of imagery of Isaiah 61. Sit back and enjoy the ride. But remember: in an aeroplane, the nuts and bolts are just as important as the wings.