

# THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

15<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Ante Communion 11.00 a.m.

## GATHERING IN GOD'S NAME

### *Welcome & Greeting*

Grace and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

**and also with you.**

Blessed are those who will come  
from east and west, from north and south,  
**to feast in the kingdom of God.**

### *Prayer of Preparation*

Let us pray.

**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.**

**Opening Hymn** TIS 284. tune Merle's Tune or Morning Light (592)

- 1. O bless the God of Israel who comes to set us free;  
who visits and redeems us, with love for all to see.  
The prophets spoke of mercy, of rescue and release:  
God shall fulfil his promise and bring our people peace.**
- 2. He comes! The Child of David,  
the Son whom God has given;  
he comes to live among us and raise us up to heaven:  
before him goes his servant - forerunner in the way,  
the prophet of salvation, the herald of the Day.**
- 3. Where once were fear and darkness  
the sun begins to rise — the dawning of forgiveness  
upon the sinner's eyes. He guides the feet of pilgrims  
along the paths of peace:  
O bless our God and Saviour with songs that never cease.**

## The Advent Wreath Advent 3 – Joy

*Third Candle is lit*

The poet, Mary Oliver, wrote:  
“If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy,  
don’t hesitate.  
Give in to it...life has some possibility left...  
Joy is not made to be a crumb.”



It seemed impossible, but the Israelites returned to their home  
from exile in Babylon.  
The prophet Isaiah offered a song of celebration.  
Come and rejoice! Eat and drink! Get your priorities in order!  
Can't you see that God is close by?  
The people rejoiced, amazed to have a second chance.  
The end of the story has yet to be written.

When we light the candle of Joy,  
we celebrate the One who has come,  
is coming and will come again.

**Whatever we face in life,  
God will make joy possible.**

*Kyrie*

**Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

*The Collect is said or sung*

Almighty God, you sent your Son into a world  
where the wheat must be winnowed from the chaff  
and evil clings even to what is good.

Let the fire of your Spirit purge us of greed and deceit,  
so that, purified, we may find our peace in you  
and you may delight in us.

Grant 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 prophet Zephaniah [3. 14-20]**

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!  
The Lord has taken away the judgements against you,  
he has turned away your enemies.  
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.  
The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.  
I will remove disaster from you,  
so that you will not bear reproach for it.  
I will deal with all your oppressors at that time.  
And I will save the lame and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.  
At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

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

### **A Song of Isaiah (12. 2-6)**

**‘Behold, God is my salvation:  
I will trust and will not be afraid;  
‘For the Lord God is my strength and my song:  
and has become my salvation.’**

**With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**

**On that day you will say:**

**‘Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name;  
‘Make known his deeds among the nations:  
proclaim that his name is exalted.**

**‘Sing God’s praises, who has triumphed gloriously:  
let this be known in all the world.**

**‘Shout and sing for joy, you that dwell in Zion:  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.’**

## **A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Philippians [4. 4-7]**

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

Hear the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **Gradual Hymn: TiS 787. Tune, Christ be our Light.**

- 1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  
Longing for truth, we turn to you.  
Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.**

*Christ, be our light!*

*Shine in our hearts.*

*Shine through the darkness.*

*Christ, be our light!*

*Shine in your church gathered today.*

- 2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.**

*Christ, be our light . . . .*

- 3. Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.**

*Christ, be our light . . . .*

- 4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
walls made of living stone.**

*Christ, be our light . . . .*

The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Luke [3. 7-18]

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

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? Bear 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. Even 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.'

And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' Soldiers 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.'

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John 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. His 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.'

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

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

***Christ, be our light!***

***Shine in our hearts.***

***Shine through the darkness.***

***Christ, be our light!***

***Shine in your church gathered today.***

5. **Many the gifts, many the people,  
many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
making your kingdom come.**

***Christ, be our light . . .***

*a time for reflection*

*Affirmation of Faith (APBA p. 37)*

**We believe in one God,  
who made and loves all that is.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ,  
God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was born, lived, died and rose again,  
and is coming to call all to account.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
who calls, equips and sends out God's people,  
and brings all things to their true end.**

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

**We believe in one God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

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

*Silence may be kept*

**Most merciful God,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart.  
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
In your mercy forgive what we have been,  
help us to amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be;  
that we may do justly,  
love mercy,  
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.**

*The declaration of forgiveness*

May the God of love and power  
forgive us and free us from our sins,  
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,  
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## THE GREETING OF PEACE

May the God of peace make us completely holy,  
ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**The peace of the Lord be always with us.**

*All may exchange a sign of peace*

**Offertory Hymn** TiS 273. tune, Helmsley

1. **Lo! he comes with clouds descending,  
once for favoured sinners slain;  
thousand thousand saints attending  
swell the sound of this refrain:  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!  
God appears on earth to reign.**
2. **Every eye shall now behold him  
robed in awesome majesty;  
those who have betrayed and sold him,  
pierced and nailed him to the tree,  
deeply shamed before him,  
deeply shamed before him,  
deeply shamed before him  
shall the true Messiah see.**
3. **Those dear tokens of his passion  
still his dazzling body bears,  
cause of endless exultation  
to his ransomed worshippers:  
with what rapture, with what rapture,  
with what rapture  
gaze we on those glorious scars!**
4. **Sing amen! let all adore you,  
high on your eternal throne;  
Saviour, take the power and glory,  
claim the kingdom for your own;  
O come quickly, O come quickly, O come quickly;  
hallelujah! Come, Lord, come.**

Charles Wesley 1707–88 alt.  
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*Offertory prayers 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 PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

*The leader says*

We pray for the peoples of the world, for all who know persecution, starvation or war.

We pray for peace in Sudan and the Middle East.

Come to us and bring freedom and peace to your people;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the leaders of nations, for those who make and administer law.

We pray this week for the nations of People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Macau.

Come to us and give wisdom to all who govern;

come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for this nation, for the diversity of people for whom Australia is home.

we pray today for All who are involved in Primary Industry: Farmers and farm workers. Primary Industry organisations. Agricultural researchers.

Come to us and bring reconciliation and justice to all who live here;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your church,

for all who would repent and prepare for your coming.

This week we pray for The Syrian Orthodox Church in Australia.

In our cycle of prayer we pray today for The Diocese of Melbourne, Abp Philip Freier (*Joy*); Regional Bishops: Paul Barker, Genieve Blackwell (*John*), Brad Billings (*Karen*) Katie Prowd (*Roger*).

Community of the Holy Name. Clergy and People.

We pray for Clarence our Bishop, *Michelle. Kian & Kyle.*

The Parochial District of Cobram: P-i-C: Victor Adams (*Elizabeth*)

the Parish leaders and community at St Margaret's, Cobram.

The St Aidan's Op Shop—Strathmerton.

Hospital Chaplain Catherine Dawson at Albury/Wodonga Health.

In our parishes we give thanks for parishioners who are involved in groups in the wider Community.



And we pray for the Co-operating Ministry between the Wangaratta Parishes to develop under your guidance.

Come to us and do not hold our misdoings against us;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all from whom we are separated by bitterness, jealousy or resentment.

We pray for all who find this time of the year to be fraught.

Come to us and renew us with your love;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who suffer, for the sick and the dying and all who mourn.

Remembering those for whom we have asked to pray,  
Margot, Warren, Rob, Mark, Shirley, Bp Garry, Josef, Wayne, Michael, Kaye.

Come to us and comfort the sick and sorrowing;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are lonely and friendless,  
for the unnoticed and unwanted.

Come to us and gather to yourself the lost and outcast;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who dwell with you in heaven, remembering this week:  
Charles Norton-Wood. Stella Kershaw. Ella Sessions. Dorrie Elliot.  
Arthur Lucas. Russell Kneebone.

Come to us and bring us home to your eternal presence;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who wait in hope for your coming.

Come to us in weakness and humility  
and reveal to us your power and glory;  
come, Holy God, and, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray for the coming of the kingdom,

**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 forever. Amen.**

*Notices*

**Concluding Hymn** TiS 274. tune, Crediton

1. **The people that in darkness walked  
have seen a glorious light;  
the light has shined on them who dwelt  
in death's surrounding night.**
2. **To hail you, Sun of righteousness,  
the gathering nations come:  
rejoicing as when reapers bear  
their harvest treasures home.**
3. **To us a child of hope is born,  
to us a Son is given;  
him shall the tribes of earth obey,  
him all the hosts of heaven.**
4. **His name shall be the Prince of Peace,  
for evermore adored,  
the Wonderful, the Counsellor,  
the great and mighty Lord.**
5. **His power increasing still shall spread,  
his reign no end shall know:  
justice shall guard his throne above  
and peace abound below.**

John Morison 1750-98 vv. 3-5  
and compilers vv. 1-2

Let us pray.

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 Dismissal*

As we await our coming Saviour,  
go in the peace of Christ.

**Thanks be to God.**

## The Third Sunday of Advent

How will people ever learn that the Bible and its message are politically relevant—that the proclamation of God’s kingdom challenges the kingdoms of the world—if we omit the verses that say so (in this case Luke 3:19–20)?

Josephus tells us that Herod regarded John as a threat. Well, he would, wouldn’t he: a fiery prophet drawing crowds and talking about God’s kingdom. Luke tells us that John singled out Herod for direct attack. It wasn’t just that Herod’s marital arrangements were unethical, out of line with God’s ideal. The point was that they disqualified Herod from being God’s true king. John pointed to Jesus as the genuine king of the Jews; but this meant confronting the claims of the existing king. How could Jesus be the king? Because Herod was a sham. How could you tell that Herod was a sham? Look at his personal life. The attack on Herod, and John’s imprisonment and subsequent death, are part of the inner meaning of his kingdom-announcement.

The pattern of polemical kingdom-proclamation is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. Zephaniah’s message to Israel, of long-awaited joy and relief, needs to include the reassurance that God will deal with all oppressors outside, and all prejudices within, his people. The enemies that have made Israel’s life a misery will do so no more; the destructive honour/shame culture that has kept the physically handicapped as second-class citizens will be swept aside. All God’s people will join in the great celebration. No one versed in Scriptures such as these could fail to see that they were coming true in the work of Jesus, as the lame and the outcast found themselves healed, welcomed into the family at last.

We can keep the political implications of the gospel at bay by removing some passages; we can achieve the same result by reading others without noticing their wider context. When Paul told the Philippians to ‘rejoice in the Lord’, he was writing to a Roman colony

*(Continued on page 12)*

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where 'Lord' meant Caesar, and where celebration was what happened on Caesar's birthday and many similar imperial festivals. Philippi, along with many other cities in Greece and Turkey under Roman rule, relied heavily on the *pax Romana*, the peace which had come after the civil war a century before, and which was maintained by heavy-handed and often brutal rule. Against this ambiguous blessing, Paul places 'the peace of God, which passes all understanding'. In the true King, Jesus, God has won the victory over enemies more dangerous and subtle than those of the Roman state. The Advent hope that God's peace will one day rule in the world enables it now to rule in our hearts, and gives us the courage to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, even when this means challenging the kingdoms of the world.

Wright, N. T. (2000). Twelve Months of Sundays: Reflections on Bible Readings, Year C (p. 6). Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

