

Wednesday 25 January 2023

The conversion of St Paul



The conversion of the anti-Christian zealot, Saul, to the apostle of Christ, Paul, is clearly related in the Acts of the Apostles, but it has to be remembered that this was a beginning: Saul took some time to become Paul and some time to begin to understand that his call to preach—to Jew and to Gentile—the saving power of Jesus, the Son of God, was something that was a whole life's journey for him. Paul says in his Letter to the Church in Galatia, 'God set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace ... Three years after [the Damascus Road conversion], I went up to Jerusalem.'

The preparation for this moment of his conversion was his whole life. This feast has been celebrated in the Church since the sixth century but became universal in the twelfth century.

Sermon and prayers of intercession © the Revd Denise Owen.

Liturgy © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes this service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Mine eye have seen the glory](#)

(click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All 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.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

We were once dead through the trespasses and sins in which we lived,
but now we are alive together with Christ.

Through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father,
to whom we humbly confess our sins.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
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 grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

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.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The collect for the Conversion of St Paul

Almighty God,
who caused the light of the gospel
to shine throughout the world
through the preaching of your servant Saint Paul:
grant that we who celebrate his wonderful conversion
may follow him in bearing witness to your truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah

The word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'

Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.' *Jeremiah 1:4-10*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, and went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' All who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah. *Acts 9:1-22*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 To God be the glory

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Then Peter said in reply, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.' *Matthew 19:27-30*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

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

Some Christians can name the time and day of their conversion. They know for sure that they committed themselves to follow Christ on such and such a day, and at such and such a time, and in such at such and such a place. Their conversion is very specific, and very clear. I think it's fair to say that Saul/Paul would be one of those people, although he wouldn't have called himself a Christian at the time. He knew when and where he first encountered the living Christ, and he gloried in this revelation, retelling the story on more than one occasion. And who can blame him? This man, who in that phrase from Acts, 'breath[ed] threats and murder' against the disciples, suddenly becomes one of the most fervent and active followers of Christ. Saul becoming a disciple was sudden and dramatic, a complete 'metanoia', a change of heart and mind, after which nothing was the same for him, and it should probably be said, the whole world.

However, this is not the full story. As is mentioned above, although the moment of the Christophany, when Christ reveals himself to Saul, was dramatic and sudden, the conversion of Saul into Paul takes a much longer time. This is quite a comfort for people like me who can't put a date or time to their 'conversion', or name that

moment when the commitment to the Lord was made. I only know that I am committed, and I call myself a disciple of Christ.

During the time after his conversion, Paul spent time with Christians, praying, worshipping, talking, and learning, until he knew he was ready to fulfil the mission God had given him, but I'm sure Paul wouldn't have said he was the finished Christian article. He, like all Christians would continue learning, exploring and discovering. Even those believers who like Paul seem to know exactly what they believe and exactly what God wants, need to be listening and learning, growing and flourishing.

This might be what is sometimes called 'conversion of life'. That although, some of us may know the exact date and time etc. when we chose to follow the Lord, our Christian life doesn't and shouldn't stop there. We continue to come to the Lord daily, to 'take up our cross' as Jesus put it, and ask for forgiveness, guidance, wisdom or whatever it may be. The Lord wants us to grow into maturity of faith, depth of understanding and ever greater love and hope. These and other Christian virtues can only be achieved at the 'coal face' of everyday life, as we live in the midst of the ups and downs of relationships, work, the news and the other challenges we face. For Christians there's no stepping outside of the 'secular' world, we are part of it and we live our lives of faith within it. As we know from reading the letters, Paul himself had to deal with issues which seem to have very little to do with redemption and salvation, and he had to deal with them as a Christian in a Christian way.

It's the way we tackle the challenges and difficulties we meet that demonstrates the quality of our faith, and shape us as Christians with the help of the Holy Spirit. This is 'conversion of life' lived out in real life, and is unavoidable whether we have the dramatic conversion experience of a Saul, or the slow developing into committed faith of some others.

We know that Paul went on to achieve incredible things for God, unmatched in the history of the Church, but he was following the calling God had given him, not only in actions and evangelism, but in the way he modelled the Christian life. In this way we are no different to him, we all have a calling from God and we are all called to live as disciples in a society with little interest in Christianity. This is a gift, a joy and privilege offered to us by the Lord! Amen

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

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

Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father

In Your mercy, you showed Saul that he was misusing his gifts and zeal and was persecuting rather than celebrating those who had found You in Jesus. Help us all to understand Your call and to celebrate those gifts which You have given us and to use them in service of each other, rather than ourselves.

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

You have not forgotten any of us and have heaped upon us all, blessings and gifts through which we can love You and serve. Each of us holds within us a spark of You. Help us to fan the flame and build that spark into a fire which burns with a passion and zeal for serving and joyfully praising Your Holy Name. In this season of new beginnings and new resolutions, help us to reflect upon our lives and to turn away from harmful influences and towards Your love. You sent Your Son to love us and to show us the way and Your Holy Spirit to be our guide and our companion on the road back to You. Help us to recognise Your voice in those still, quiet moments and in those hectic, tempestuous times alike.

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

We pray for those who have to hide their Christian identity for fear of violence and oppression. Just as You spoke to Saul, speak to those who fear You and want to rid Your children from society. Help us to help the isolated in any way that we can and to never forget their struggle to live lives with You at the heart of all things. We pray for Your Church, that it can shine out in the darkness of oppression and in the presence of violence, and can provide hope, shelter and belonging to those who long to know Your love.

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

We pray for those who have been affected by Covid and disease. For those who are sick and for those who are caring for the sick. We ask for healing Lord as You know best. You have a plan for each of us and the number of our days are known only unto You. We pray for Your peace to be with all of those who are worried at this time, we pray for Your strength for those families who are caring for their sick, and we pray for Your Comfort for those who are struggling, including those we know...

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful God

We pray for those whose passing is remembered at this time. For those who have recently passed and for those who are grieving. Our grief is a reflection of our love, but we need Your comfort and Your peace to help us to live with the loss that we feel.

Lord in Your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Let the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [Agnus Dei](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May Christ who called Paul to his service,
and to preach the Good News to the world,
strengthen you to witness to his grace and love.

And the blessing of God the Almighty:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

be with you now and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

HYMN 4 [Revelation song](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good, our duty and our joy,
at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For on this day he called to his service
the blasphemer and persecutor of your Church.

Saul, who had resisted your grace,
became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Because he was faithful and true in his ministry,
you made him an example of patient service,
to instruct in the way of eternal life

all those who heard his preaching and believed your word.

Now, therefore, he who became your chosen instrument
for the salvation of the nations

has made us also eager to proclaim your mercy,
and sing in union with all the powers of heaven
the joyful hymn of your praise:

**All 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.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All 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 St Paul and 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.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All 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.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ

which he gave for you,

and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,

and feed on him in your hearts

by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God, the source of truth and love,
keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
united in prayer and the breaking of bread,
and one in joy and simplicity of heart,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with 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.