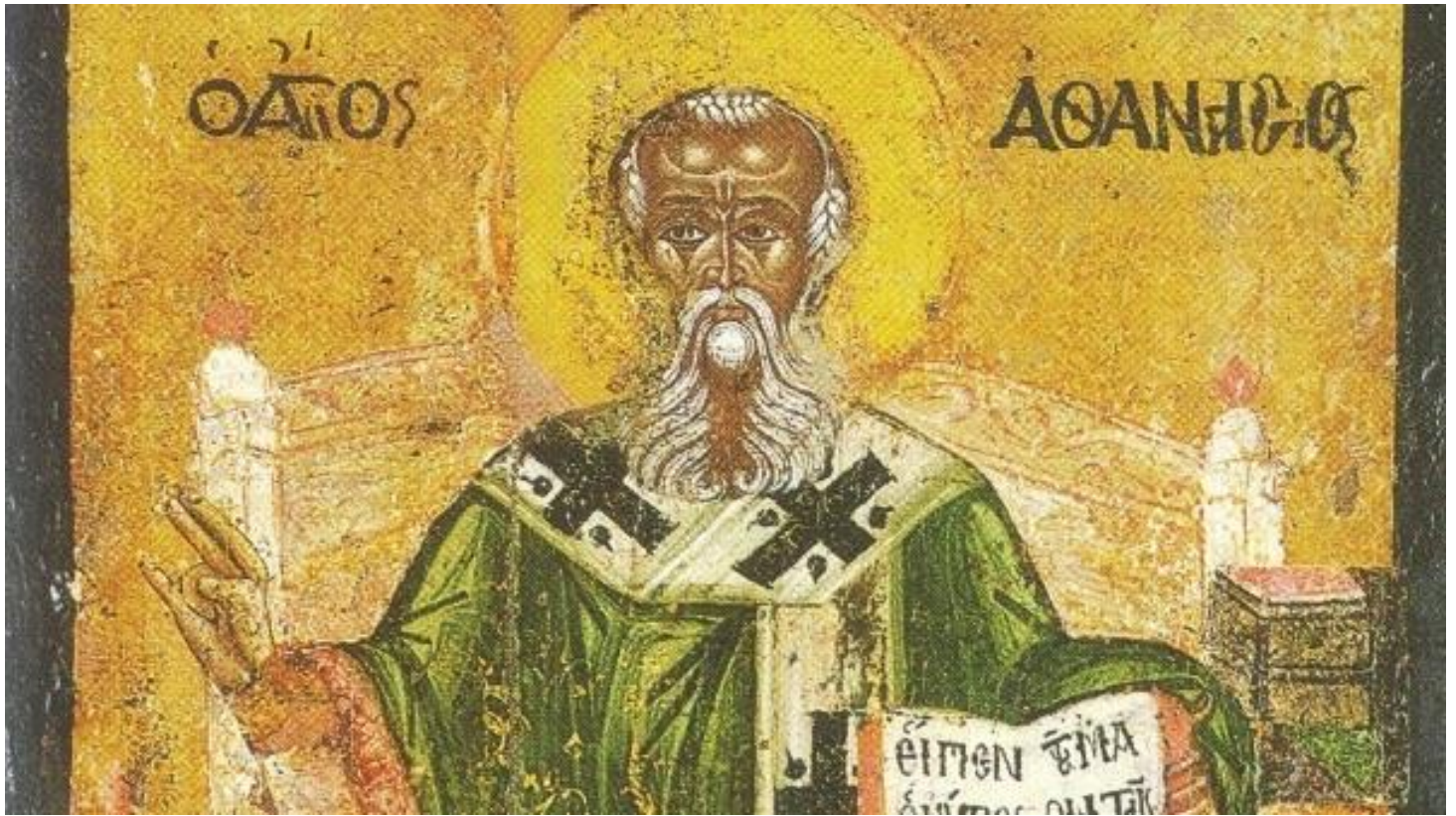


Tuesday 2 May 2023

St Athanasius



Athanasius was born in about the year 296 AD of Christian parents and educated at the Catechetical school in Alexandria. He was present at the Council of Nicaea as a deacon, accompanying his bishop Alexander, whom he succeeded as Patriarch in the year 328 AD. Athanasius held firmly to the doctrines of the Church as defined by that Council and became the leader of those opposed to the teachings of Arian, which denied the divinity of Christ. He was deposed from—and restored to—his See several times because of his uncompromising faith. In or out of exile, Athanasius continued his writings. He always championed orthodoxy over heresy and the essential need for the Church to teach the true doctrines of the faith rather than anything that anything appearing to be a watered-down version of it. He was a strong believer in asceticism as a means of restoring the divine image in humanity and thus a supporter of monasticism, which was in its nascent state at that time.

He was a friend of Pachomius and wrote the *Life of Antony of Egypt*, which showed the cenobitic life as holding a balance between things earthly and heavenly. He died on this day in the year 373 AD.

Sermon © the Revd Robin Wilding.

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Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

Prayers of intercession © Athanasius.

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

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link. Please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,
<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Firmly I believe and truly](#) (please 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.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

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 St Athanasius

Everliving God,
whose servant Athanasius testified
to the mystery of the Word made flesh for our salvation:
help us, with all your saints,
to contend for the truth
and to grow into the likeness of your Son,
Jesus Christ 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 Ecclesiasticus

Watch for the opportune time, and beware of evil, and do not be ashamed to be yourself. For there is a shame that leads to sin, and there is a shame that is glory and favour. Do not show partiality, to your own harm, or deference, to your downfall. Do not refrain from speaking at the proper moment, and do not hide your wisdom. For wisdom becomes known through speech, and education through the words of the tongue. Never speak against the truth, but be ashamed of your ignorance. Do not be ashamed to confess your sins, and do not try to stop the current of a river. Do not subject yourself to a fool, or show partiality to a ruler. Fight to the death for truth, and the Lord God will fight for you.

Ecclesiasticus 4:20-28

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the Letter of St Paul to the Colossians

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:11–20

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 This I believe

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

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples, 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a servant above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the servant like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.'

Matthew 10:24–27

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Athanasius came to church leadership at a vital time. There had been a vicious persecution of the church just before Constantine became emperor and brought Christianity to the centre of empire life. That persecution resulted in some people coming to powerful positions in the church who had less than orthodox views on the nature of Christ—in particular a man named Arius from Alexandria who denied the divinity of our Lord. In part this was an intent to celebrate his humanity but it succeeded only, in its formulation, in splitting the church into factions.

The first consequence was the slightly unsatisfactory Council of Nicaea, called by Constantine to bring unity to the church and resolve the questions. It got rather bogged down in debates of subtle Greek phrases although its definite conclusion was the orthodox position of the divinity and humanity of Christ being both essential for salvation and the revelation of scripture.

Unfortunately, the Arian groups failed to back the council's conclusions and central to the debates over most of the rest of his life is Athanasius—exiled from his see but continuing to write and argue for the truth. Perhaps sometimes his rhetoric didn't help his cause but his passion for the truth of who Jesus is was everything to him.

Why does it matter so much? It's not some esoteric debate about theoretical philosophical stuff. It speaks to the heart of salvation. If Jesus is limited in nature, then his sacrifice is limited in effect—it cannot save to the uttermost and we end up struggling and failing to be holy so that we may be saved. Interestingly, Athanasius wrote a history of Anthony of Egypt who started the hermetic/monastic life that influenced so many. One of the discoveries of monasticism is that however far we may go to escape the world and its sinfulness, we can never ever escape our own capacity to fail and fall short of God and his standards. That's why we need a Saviour who has the answer to the mess we make of our own lives and our own hearts—and Jesus the man who bears unspoilt humanity before God and who by his divinity pays the price for the sins of the whole world has the answer we need. Only He can make it possible for even one such as I with all the mistakes and sins and failures I bear to find the amazing love of God and receive the great grace of a welcome to his heart and home—me adopted as his child. Wow!

This is the place where Christianity rises above all other faiths in the world and in history. Only in Christ are failures saved to the uttermost; only here is there an answer for sinners. Here is the full remarkable love of God made manifest that whoever who calls on his name will be saved—not because we deserve it but because Jesus saw our need and was willing to go to the uttermost for our sake. How we love him!

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

You are Jesus, the Son of the Father, Yea, Amen.

You are He who commands the Cherubim and the Seraphim, Yea, Amen.

You have existed with the Father in truth always, Yea, Amen.

You rule the angels, Yea, Amen.

You are the power of the Heavens, Yea, Amen.

You are the crown of the martyrs, Yea, Amen.

You are the deep counsel of the saints, Yea, Amen.

You are Him in whom the deep counsel of the Father is hidden, Yea, Amen.

You are the mouth of the prophets, Yea, Amen.

You are the tongue of the angels, Yea, Amen.

You are Jesus my life, Yea, Amen.

You are Jesus the object and boast of the world, Yea, Amen.

The dying prayer of Athanasius

Jesus, You are God's holy one!

Even though we sometimes experience Your message as too difficult and
challenging, we still seek to believe You.

We don't want to walk away because it does not make worldly sense.
Give us the faith of Peter and the apostles, who stuck with You, even amid their doubts and questions.
You are the Spirit Who gives life.
You are God's Word Who is effective power.
Continue to manifest Your risen Presence among us, Lord Jesus.
As Peter cured the paralytic and raised Tabitha, we need to be touched and healed.
Allow Your healing Power to awake the paralysis of our hearts and minds, and those parts of us which are dead.
Enliven and free us and be the transcendent, present power which moves us to free and raise up others.
We need the miracle of faith in You.
Thanks for being eternal life and power for us.

All Amen

It becomes you to be mindful of us,
as you stand near Him who granted you all graces,
for you are the Mother of God and our Queen.
Help us for the sake of the King,
the Lord God and Master who was born of you.
For this reason,
you are called full of grace.
Remember us, most Holy Virgin,
and bestow on us gifts
from the riches of your graces,
O Virgin full of grace.

All Amen

Prayer to the Virgin Mary

The Athanasian Creed.

This creed was not written by Athanasius but was inspired by his huge contribution to the ecumenical councils of the fourth century. It uses the word 'Catholic' here to mean the whole of the known Church. He does not mean the Roman Catholic Church because it did not then exist.

Merciful Father,

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

The peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 I believe in God the Father maker of the universe [\(click here\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May the peace of God which passes all understanding
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
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 We Believe in God the Father [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

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, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.
The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.
We, your holy Church, acclaim you.
In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**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 Athanasius 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

God of truth,
whose Wisdom set her table
and invited us to eat the bread and drink the wine
of the kingdom:
help us to lay aside all foolishness
and to live and walk in the way of insight,
that we may come with your servant Athanasius
to the eternal feast of heaven;
through 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.