

Sunday 17 December 2023

The Third Sunday of Advent



Sermon © Peter Haslam.

Liturgy © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Prayers of intercession © Subversive Undercroft.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

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

All the hymns are hosted on YouTube. Please click on the links to hear them.

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

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

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [As with gladness men of old](#) (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.

When the Lord comes he will bring to light things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Therefore, in the light of Christ,

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 The Gloria is usually omitted in Advent

The Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
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 Isaiah

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 brokenhearted, 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. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory. Because their shame was double, and dishonour was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs. 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.

Isaiah 61:1–11

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians

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.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 In dulci jubilo
Wexford carol

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

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

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All 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. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me”.’) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

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 baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptise 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 baptising. *John 1:6-28*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

One day, a young boy was practising his fiddle. He dismally scraped back and forth across the instrument, while his dog set up accompanying with howling and wailing. Finally, his sister stuck her head in his room and said, ‘Can’t you play something the dog doesn’t know?’

This story shows us that until a learner student learns how to push down with the bow and draw a steady tone from the instrument, it can sound gruesome. Today, I would like to talk about learning to play the fiddle ... specifically, learning to play ... second fiddle. This little phrase, playing second fiddle, has some definite negative connotations. Most people don’t like playing second fiddle. Most board members dream of becoming CEO, the back-up goalkeeper awaits his chance to be number one and most theatrical understudies want to be the star. The phrase, ‘second fiddle’ comes from the practice of having the best player of each instrument sit in the first chair position, while the second-best player sits in the second-chair position and plays the second-fiddle part. It’s less glamorous with less prestige. A lot of people have a hard time playing second fiddle to someone

else's first fiddle. What's even more difficult is playing second fiddle, when you had previously held the first-chair position but now play the second part, when once you were considered the best performer. How degrading, how embarrassing that can be! Can we put ourselves in that situation; can we understand what feelings we might have?

Well, in the Bible, we learn of those who have played second fiddle. John, the Baptist knew about this, for at one time he was the best: the best preacher in the land. Multitudes came into the desert to hear him preach. He was known throughout the country. He was famous! John had a very large following. Then came Jesus. I wonder how John felt about stepping aside and pointing his disciples to Jesus. How was he able to do this unselfish act and humble himself? Verse 35 in today's Gospel says, "The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.' If we put ourselves in John the Baptist's shoes, watching two of your closest disciples walk off to follow another, watching the multitudes leave to seek out someone else. I'm sure you can understand the possible temptations that John faced. He could have ignored Jesus and selfishly sought the admiration of the crowds and his followers. But he didn't. For anyone to be able to play second fiddle, they must be self-assured. Socrates suggested that the key to wisdom is to 'know thyself'.

How many people really know themselves? How long does it take to really know who you are and where you fit in this world? For some, it takes a lifetime ... we all start out innocently enough, but as we grow and are tempted by all the worldly possibilities for our lives, and we begin to experiment and learn, we find that we don't fit sometimes. We can't seem to find our niche in this world. For some, it seems so easy. Right out of education they know what they want to do with their lives ... they know the direction they want to go. And yet, for others the search goes on and on. Knowing yourself ... there seems to me to be a very careful balance here ... a balance between a healthy self-esteem and an unhealthy self-will.

Self-esteem is a respect for and a confident acceptance of oneself as a person created by and useful to God. Self-esteem must be based on an understanding that people are created by God to be highly exalted and miserably fallen in their sin. A healthy self-esteem is knowing that each of us are of inestimable value to God and greatly loved by Him. Becoming self-elated or self-willed turns us away from our God. A self-willed person begins to lead his own life such a person becomes selfish and arrogant ... and lost.

John the Baptist knew who he was ... He knew that he wasn't the Christ anticipated in the Old Testament Scriptures. Even with his great oratorical gifts, his large

following, his amazing sense of the righteous, he simply says, 'I am a voice calling in the wilderness' He does not identify as a man, nor a preacher, not even a prophet ... just a voice, an instrument of God. John knew who he was and was confident in his role as the voice of God. But, when Jesus came into his life, he knew he had found his purpose for living—he was a voice preparing the way for the Lamb of God. And that's where it has to begin ... it has to begin with asking God what is His plan for your life. How and where are you to serve? The search needs to start with God.

When we begin to find answers in our search, we might find that our niche is to play second fiddle. We find that we aren't meant for places of power or stardom, but we should serve and support. Maybe, we are meant to stay at home and raise our children or maybe ours is to work a daily grind and provide the money to support a growing family. We never really know, sometimes, how our roll of playing second fiddle might actually be the support that someone needs ... the assurance that someone longs for. Learning to put others before ourselves is putting ourselves into the second fiddlers seat. If we are to successfully learn to play second fiddle, we must be willing to lose ourselves in the task. We must be willing to accept our responsibilities and fulfil them to best of our ability.

John the Baptist knew his role was to serve and support the Lamb of God. He said of Jesus in John 3:30, 'He must increase and I must decrease.' John understood that he was to 'prepare the way' and he was willing to lose himself in the task of doing that. With his great gift of oration, he pointed to Jesus as the One, the Messiah, the Son of God. John understood that serving Jesus was the way to receive honour from the Father. Therefore, he was willing to lose himself that he might find himself; he was willing to give himself away in order for Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, to be lifted up. Every Christian knows about John the Baptist but only because he gave up his place that Jesus might be known. John was willing to play second fiddle for Christ.

Finally, as we learn to play second fiddle, we must 'Trust': we must trust in God to lead us ... to get us through the tough times, to help us keep our eye on the goal and purpose that we have found for our lives. When we understand God's plan, you can accept the role of playing second fiddle ... or third or last ... or maybe even first fiddle. We find we are able to be responsible to God in the place he has put you and that you can be effective in doing the task appropriate to that opportunity.

It is said that the believer must learn to have such a strong trust in God and Jesus during the good times, that when the dark moments of life come, that trust will remain and support you. The hymn, *'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus* was written by a most remarkable woman, Louisa Stead. She was born in about 1850, in Dover. As a youngster she felt the call of God upon her life for missionary service. And after

the tragedy of watching her husband drown trying to save a young boy, she wrote these words to this now-famous hymn, *'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus*. Louisa trusted, she was willing to play second fiddle to the Will of God and was able to trust in Jesus and go on with her life. She was led to missionary work in Africa and worked there for many years until her death in 1917.

We've all known people who were great 'second fiddle' players. Those are the ones who become indelibly etched in our memories ... those are the ones who lead us, help us, console us with their life's example. Second fiddle is pretty important to God. By God's Grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can play second fiddle and harmonise with the whole orchestra. We can support and proclaim, in our own way, the one who should come first. Then the entire world can know that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who has also come to be a servant to scrub and clean the world of its dark sins.

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

The voice of God cries out in the wilderness, calling us to a transformed way of living. Let us respond to this invitation through the offering of our prayers.

Come to us, Holy Comforter, with your promise to bring a new heaven and a new earth to your people, saving us from the fires of sin and despair, and offering to us the solemn gifts of grace and salvation.

All Come, Lord Jesus.

Come into the hearts of your people, that we may turn from our selfish consumption of fossil fuels, our waste of food and clothing, our recklessness with money, and our carelessness with the gifts of creation.

All Come, Lord Jesus.

Come into the body of the Church and make us a baptising community, that multitudes may hear your message of repentance and hope, and receive your free gift of eternal love.

All Come, Lord Jesus.

Come with your Holy Spirit, into the hearts of those who are unemployed, abused, poorly educated, and who are persecuted for their faith, and awaken hope.

All Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to young people everywhere, that they may have a desire to study your commandments and to exercise ministry in the world outside the Church

All Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to those with power, and to all who exercise offices of authority; that wisdom may be their guide, and that true love of their people may direct their decisions.

All Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to those we love but see no more and gather them into your heavenly rest.

All Come, Lord Jesus.

Merciful Father,

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

The peace

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

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Maranatha

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The word 'Maranatha' is Aramaic for 'come Lord'

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below.

The Dismissal

May God himself, the God of peace,
make you perfect and holy,
and keep you safe and blameless, in spirit, soul and body,
for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;
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 Longing for light

(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.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.
And so we gladly thank you,
with saints and angels 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 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

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.

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.