

**Sunday 24 December 2023**

# Midnight Mass



**Sermon** © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

**Liturgy and prayers of intercession** © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

**Bible readings** © the publishers of the NRSV translation (except the Gospel which is RSV).

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** [Once in royal David's city](#)

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

## 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 the light of the world has come  
to dispel the darkness of our hearts.

In his light let us examine ourselves and 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**

**All** Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.**

### **The collect for Midnight Mass (Christmas Night)**

Eternal God,  
who made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of your one true light:  
bring us, who have known the revelation of that light on earth,  
to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;  
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 days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

*Jeremiah 31:31-34*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

## Second reading

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. *Hebrews 1:1-12*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN 2 The Angel Gabriel from Heaven came**

[\(please click here\)](#)

## Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

**All Glory to you O Lord.**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the [children] of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. *John 1:1-14 (RSV)*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**All Praise to you O Christ**

## Sermon

I wonder if you take notice of urban myths? There seem to be so many of them. An urban myth is something that everyone knows and everyone knows to be true. The only problem is that they're not true. Here's a very simple example: everyone knows that Queen Victoria's catchphrase was, 'We are not amused!' The problem? There is absolutely no evidence she ever used the words, not even once. Indeed, she had an excellent sense of humour and was always playing practical jokes on her friends, family and courtiers —even her Prime Ministers.

Here's another. 'Everyone knows that eight hundred years ago King John signed the Magna Carta.' It's an urban myth because he didn't. Medieval kings never did anything as demeaning as holding a mere pen. In this case, his Chancellor affixed a seal to the document. Indeed, there's not much evidence that King John could even read let alone sign something.

Here's one more. If enough people write the word 'Jedi' as their religion on their census forms the Government will be forced to make it an official religion. Certainly at the time of the last census, in 2021, many thousands did just that ... but it made no difference. The urban myth is simply not true.

And here's yet another, which also talks about kings, rulers, and religion. Here goes: 'We cannot know God or experience him.' Once again, it's an urban myth. Why? Because it's not true: *we can*.

I'll start at the beginning which in our case is a Cook's tour explaining the meaning of Christmas. Since the dawn of recorded time and almost certainly long before, people have been yearning to know God. As anyone who only just started on the path of wanting to know God has realised, if ever so slightly, that knowing God requires purity of heart. As God (in the form of Jesus) said in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God,' where the word 'see' here means see through, recognise, appreciate, know. So purity of heart is the highroad that leads to intimacy with God. The real question, though, is 'How?' How is it possible to kick-start the process of being holy enough to know God?

The answer to that question is 'Christmas' (where the '-mass' at the end of the word means 'celebration'). And we celebrate because Christmas remembers God intervening in human history and explains why 'history' ever since has been 'his story'. The whole point of Christmas is to supply the means whereby we can indeed grow into the purity of heart that allows us to know God.

God came into our world at Christmas. Long ago on that first Christmas night in far off Bethlehem, God became a small human-baby sized volume of space that today we worship as Jesus. There was so large an amount of God in the small child that it's simpler to simply say that Jesus *was* God. Such an incarnation had never happened before.

Because God was now living in human form, he was able to understand what it's like to be human. He was able to participate in our affairs and learn first-hand the sheer desperation caused by being human. How prone to wrong-doing we are! So this God-man worked out an answer to the problem of being a human in need of God.

He realised the most obvious problem was our wrong-doing, which prevented us from achieving eternal life. Talking of eternal life, here's another urban myth: 'Walt Disney had his dead body frozen in liquid nitrogen in the hope that future technology could bring him back to life.' Again, it's not true because he was cremated ... in 1966. No—eternal life comes from another route.

Jesus brought about the way to eternal life on the first Easter. He took into his own soul our sins—all of them—as well as their eternal spiritual consequences. That's what he was born for. Being God, he dealt with those sins, destroying them with his own holiness as effectively as a chemist neutralises an acid with an alkali. With the sin gone, with *our* sin gone (if we so wish when we ask him for forgiveness), Jesus enables us to be people with a fresh start. We can be forgiven. *We are forgiven*. We can be holy. *We are holy*. We grow into holiness by asking God to live inside of us, in our soul. That is why Christians are people who live with such a radical, inclusive, overwhelming sense of hope.

So the whole point of Christmas is Easter. And the whole point of Easter is holiness. And the whole point of holiness is that we can ask God's mighty Holy Spirit into our lives and he *will* come and live with us, and make us His dwelling place for ever. Having the Spirit in our hearts, we can learn what God is like, to recognise Him, and disprove the silly urban myth that God is unknowable.

Have you heard the urban myth that God is unknowable? Forget it because it's completely untrue.

## The Creed

**All** We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and was made man.**

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

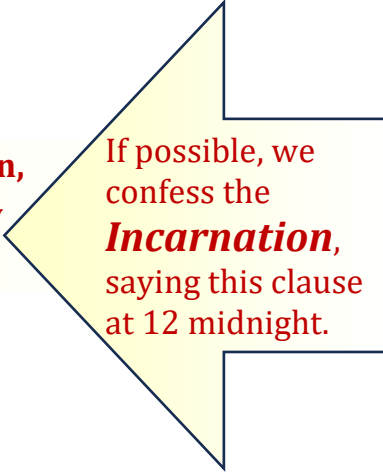
We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.



If possible, we  
confess the  
***Incarnation***,  
saying this clause  
at 12 midnight.



## Prayers of intercession

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Father, in this holy night your Son our Saviour was born in human flesh.

Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night there was no room for your Son in the inn.

Protect with your love those who have no home and all who live in poverty.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night Mary in the pain of labour brought your Son to birth.

Hold in your hand (...and) all who are in pain or distress.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night your Christ came as a light shining in the darkness.

Bring comfort to (...and) all who suffer in the sadness of our world.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night the angels sang 'Peace to God's people on earth'.

Strengthen those who work for peace and justice in (...and in) all the world.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night shepherds in the field heard good tidings of joy.

Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ's redemption.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night strangers found the Holy Family and saw the baby lying in the manger.

Bless our homes and all whom we love.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night heaven is come down to earth, and earth is raised to heaven.  
Keep in safety (...and) all those who have passed through death in the hope of heaven.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

In this holy night, Christians the world over celebrate his birth.  
Open our hearts that he may be born in us today.

Holy God

**All** hear our prayer.

Father, in this holy night angels and shepherds worshipped at the manger throne.  
Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with Mary, Joseph and the saints through him who is your Word made flesh,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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** [Away in a manger](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

## The Dismissal

May the joy of the angels,  
the eagerness of the shepherds,  
the perseverance of the wise men,  
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,  
and the peace of the Christ-child  
be yours this Christmas;  
and the blessing.

**All Amen.**

**HYMN 4 All come all ye faithful**

[\(please click here\)](#)

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.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere,  
mighty Creator, ever-living God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who for love of our fallen race humbled himself,  
was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of your Spirit,  
and lived as one of us.

In this mystery of the Word made flesh  
you have caused his light to shine in our hearts,  
to give knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.  
In him we see our God made visible  
and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see.  
Therefore with all the angels of heaven  
we lift our voices to proclaim the glory of your name  
and sing our joyful hymn of 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 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 our Father,  
in this night you have made known to us again  
the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:  
confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him  
until the day dawns  
and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.  
To him be glory both 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.