

Parish of Central Exeter

3rd Sunday in Advent

11 December 2022

'Gaudete!' Be filled with joy!

Welcome everyone.



Our reflections this morning are by Sheila and the Intercessions provided by Caroline. Many thanks to you both.

The Lighting of the Advent Candles

The third candle is used to remember John the Baptist.

If you wish to light a candle at home, do so now with these words, and we all join in with you:

God our Father, you gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age a son called John. He grew up strong in spirit, prepared the people for the coming of the Lord, and baptized them in the Jordan to wash away their sins.

Help us, who have been baptized into Christ, to be ready to welcome him into our hearts, and to grow strong in faith by the power of the Spirit. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the world. Amen.

Call to Worship

The Messiah is on the way to us.

As we prepare for his coming,

may we repent of our sins.

May we remember our baptisms with water.

May we be ready to be baptized with God's Holy Spirit and fire.

May we be ready to help our Lord proclaim the good news of God's love to all people, so that the world will be filled with joy. Amen.

The third Sunday in advent is also known as Gaudete Sunday because it's the first word (in Latin) of the introit set for this Sunday (Philippians 4: 4 Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice) which in Latin is 'Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico, Gaudete.' For this reason, the third candle is also the candle for joy.

Let us rejoice!

Because Christmas is almost here
Because dancing fits so well with music
Because inside baby clothes are miracles.
Gaudete!

Because some people love you
Because of chocolate
Because pain does not last forever
Because Santa Claus is coming.
Gaudete!

Because of laughter
Because there really are angels
Because your fingers fit your hands
Because forgiveness is yours for the asking
Because of children
Because of parents.
Gaudete!

Because the blind see.
And the lame walk.
Gaudete!

Because lepers are clean
And the deaf hear.
Gaudete!

Because the dead will live again
And there is good news for the poor.
Gaudete!

Because of Christmas
Because of Jesus
We rejoice!

(by Brad Reynolds, S.J., Posted on Journey with Jesus.)

Worship Music

‘Gaudete’ sung by the King’s Singers. The words in Latin are on screen.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQyrD7U5aNE>

Confession

We are reminded:

God is the source of our joy,
But our sin often hinders our joy and the joy of others.
Let us confess our sins before God and one another.

Confession:

Gracious God,
with joy You brought us into being.
You created the world and called it good.
And yet we have done so much to quell that goodness:
we have fought with one another and failed to live in peace;
we have shut out the stranger and disparaged the immigrant;
we have ignored the needy and judged the poor;
we have fallen short of Your command to be Your Beloved Community.
Forgive us, Merciful God, and bring us back to the joy we find in You.
This we pray in Your holy name. *Amen.*

Assurance of Pardon and Forgiveness:

God rejoices over us with gladness;
God renews us in love;
God will exult over us with loud singing.
Our sins are forgiven.
Amen

Collect for the third Sunday in Advent

God for whom we watch and wait,
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:
give us courage to speak the truth,
to hunger for justice,
and to suffer for the cause of right,
with Jesus Christ our Lord.

Worship song

‘Come thou long-expected Jesus’, sung here by the choir of St John’s College, Cambridge.
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEEd0uWnDGs>

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 35 1-10

The joy of the redeemed

35 The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Like the crocus, ² it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God.
³ Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
⁴ say to those with fearful hearts,
'Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.'
⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.
⁷ The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
In the haunts where jackals once lay,
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.
⁸ And a highway will be there;
it will be called the Way of Holiness;
it will be for those who walk on that Way.
The unclean will not journey on it;
wicked fools will not go about on it.
⁹ No lion will be there,
nor any ravenous beast;
they will not be found there.
But only the redeemed will walk there,
¹⁰ and those the Lord has rescued will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Reflective prayer

The desert will sing and rejoice and the wilderness blossom with flowers;
all will see the Lord's splendour, see the Lord's greatness and power.
Tell everyone who is anxious: Be strong and don't be afraid.
The blind will be able to see; the deaf will be able to hear;
the lame will leap and dance; those who can't speak will shout.
They will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning-knives;
the nations will live in peace; they will train for war no more.

This is the promise of God; God's promise will be fulfilled.

*Iona Community Worship Book (1988) Isaiah 35, Micah 4:1-4
(originally second half each line in bold as response.)*



Preparing the way of the Lord?

Painted Staircases created in Lima, Peru, 2021, by local artist Xomatok, using designs that reflect traditional textile patterns.

New Testament

Matthew 11 2-11

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'

⁴ Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and

the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'

⁷ As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Reflection

With the new church year, the Sunday lectionary usual gospel has moved from Luke to Matthew and hence the set reading for the third Sunday of Advent is this passage from Matthew 11 where Jesus responded to the question from John the Baptist's disciples about his credentials. His answer pointed to the miracles and linked to the passage from Isaiah 35 which was understood as messianic. Jesus then commented to the crowd about John the Baptist's ministry. Instead of discussing this passage in depth I want to comment and quote from the book I am reading '*The First Advent in Palestine. Reversals, resistance, and the ongoing complexity of hope.*' The author Kelley Nikondeha is a liberation theologian and community development practitioner who travels between the Southwest USA and Burundi in East Africa.

By describing the political situation for the people of Palestine living under the rule of King Herod she vividly introduces the background to the gospel account. An insecure and tyrannical ruler who increased taxation to pay the tribute to Rome, his secret police, the army, and his grand building projects. These included palaces for himself and his family, fortresses, stadiums and cities for the emperor and the extension to the temple. This last project was one Herod hoped would bring him favour with the Jewish population, but the increased tax burden oppressed them. Lastly Nikondeha reminds us, readers of Herod's legendary cruelty.

She describes the carefully constructed genealogy for Jesus that Matthew gives as the opening of the gospel showing both the Jewish lineage back to Abraham and the numeric significance that the number of generations are 6 sets of 7 which leads to Jesus beginning the seventh set, the new humanity. This is contrasted with the questionable origins of Herod's family though there were claims that this was linked with Jews from the exile in Babylon many in Palestine did not believe it. It is to those who now follow Jesus, as members of the new humanity, with the call to embody the new way of living and peacemaking that he began that she discusses next and here I want to quote her in full.

‘Jesus brought the beginning of peace. And those who follow his lead work for the fulfilment of it. Jesus showed us what living at peace could look like – how to respond to the places, people, and politics around us. Along with the gifts of advent, his life bequeathed to us the challenge to make choices in keeping with peace, wherever we are embedded in the world. As I, as we, live into the reality of advent hope, we embody God’s peace, not only in struggle, lament, and solidarity with others but also in the shared experience of patience for the unhurried culmination of a peaceable kingdom. The life of a peacemaker embraces the hard truth that peace will remain incomplete in our lifetime, even as others carry the campaign forward. This was the human experience of Jesus.’

In the next two paragraphs she summarises events from Jesus’ life which show how he was misunderstood and criticised which eventually led to his death. She concludes that section with these words. ‘For all his peace and patience, he collapsed into God, whom he trusted to continue the peace initiative even in his earthly absence.’ This leads to her challenge to us to continue ‘God’s mission of peace in the world, under the empires and colonial dynamics of our day.’

Though there is much to lament and despair about our country and our world in this season of Advent we can, we must, continue to have hope that freedom and peace are coming.

Worship song

‘Longing for light’, sung here by members of Victoria Church, Bristol.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZnExFOIm8w>

Prayer

Have you not heard about him, O my brothers?
Do you not know about him, O my sisters?
He was a carpenter.
The wood yielded to his hands.
His yokes were easy upon the ox’s neck,
and sweat was upon his brow.
He cared for the beggar and the dog
that licked the beggar’s sores.
He brought sight to the blind and healed the leper.
He cured the diseased in mind and gave them new life.

He can give you life that is as bread to your hungry bellies.
He can give you life that is as hours spent away from your desk.

The hearts that are his
will clear the way and build the road
that is gentle even to crippled feet.

Let him lead us. *Chandran Devanesen, India. ‘Christ of the Indian Road’ Matthew 11:2-6*

Affirmation of Faith

Jesus taught us to speak of hope as the coming of God's kingdom.

We believe that God is at work in our world
turning hopeless and evil situations into good.
We believe that goodness and justice
will triumph in the end
and that tyranny and oppression cannot last forever.
One day all tears will be wiped away;
the lamb will lie down with the lion,
and justice will roll down like a mighty stream.

True peace and true reconciliation are not only desired,
they are assured and guaranteed in Christ.

This is our faith. This is our hope. *(20th century South African creed.)*

Intercessions

Almighty God, here in the city we are surrounded by lights, decorations and the usual
hustle and bustle of the days before Christmas.

In our prayers we call to mind all those who come in and out of our churches whether to
worship, make music, run events or just sit quietly.

We would ask for a blessing on the work of the city centre chaplains, the street pastors and
the safe space team.

Let us include them in these prayers which come from the Methodist church.

Loving God we pray
When we stress that our 'to do' lists are still not done, bring us peace
When we become anxious about the people we may see or might not see, remind us you
are here.
When we look around us and all we see is darkness and despair, shine the light of Christ into
our lives.
As we watch and wait, fill us with hope and expectation.
As we reflect and pray surround us with your presence.
As we discern your will for us and for the world surprise us with your plan.
In the cold depths of winter warm us with joy.
In the darkness of the night illuminate the way.
And in the depth of doubt, reveal yourself to us.
In the presence of a child, the humility of a stable and in the obedience of Mary
We humbly pray, your will be done

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

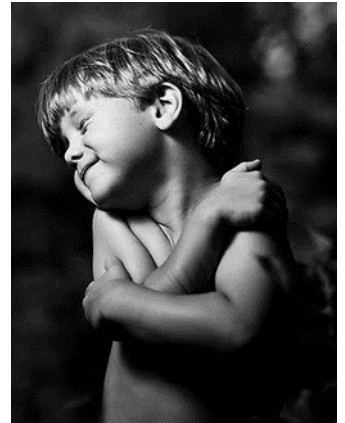
An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Nigel and St David's Choir singing
'Alleluia, O give thanks' (from their service for All Saints Day)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TE-BIxIkb9c&t=2s>





Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Post Communion Collect – the advent collect

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in
great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.



Commission & Benediction

In a cynical and despairing world, O God,
give us a quietly prophetic voice
to proclaim your hope.

In a violent and angry world, O God,
give us a quietly prophetic voice
to proclaim your peace.

In a dismissive and disinterested world, O God,
give us a quietly prophetic voice
to proclaim your compassion.

And may our quietly prophetic lives,
be channels of your restoring grace
wherever we may go. Amen.

(written by John van de Laar, and posted on Sacredise.com)

Benediction

Rejoice in the Lord always,
show gentleness to all,
do not be anxious,
make your needs known to God
by prayer, with thanksgiving;
and the peace of God
guard your heart and mind
in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

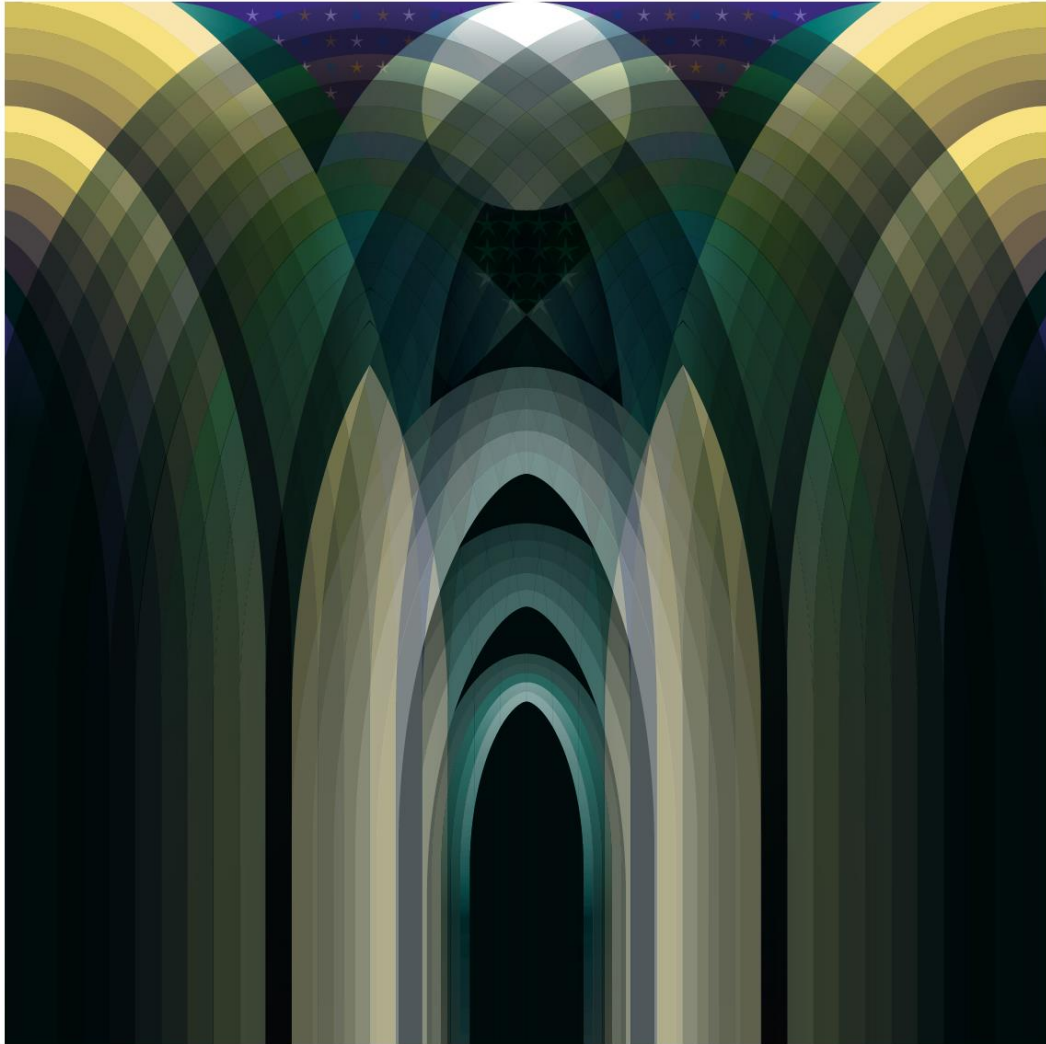
(by Michael Perry. Posted on The Jubilate Group website.)

Closing Music

Worship song

Of the Father's Love begotten.' Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kK4JLP9i7U>



'Choral Cathedral', by British artist, Marco Cazzulini, 2017, part of a series of illustrations of the Psalms – this being from Psalm 24: 'Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be lifted up, you age-abiding doors, that the King of glory may come in' – often used during Advent.