

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! Indeed the Lord is near.

COLLECT

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

FIRST READING *61:1-2.10-11*

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. 'I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in the cloak of integrity, like a bridegroom wearing his wreath, like a bride adorned in her jewels. 'For as the earth makes fresh things grow, as a garden makes seeds spring up, so will the Lord make both integrity and praise spring up in the sight of the nations.' .
The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Ps Luke 1*

Response: My Soul rejoices in my God.

1 My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. He looks on his servant in her nothingness; henceforth all ages will call me blessed. (R.)

2. The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy his name! His mercy is from age to age, on those who fear him. (R.)

3. He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty. He protects Israel, his servant, remembering his mercy. (R.)

SECOND READING *5:16-24*

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians

Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus. Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt; think before

you do anything – hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil. May the God of peace make you perfect and holy; and may you all be kept safe and blameless, spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has called you and he will not fail you.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me.

He has sent me to bring good news to the poor.

Alleluia!

GOSPEL *1:6-8.19-28*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light. This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ.' 'Well then,' they asked 'are you Elijah?' 'I am not' he said. 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord.' Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.
The Gospel of the Lord.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery and powerfully accomplished for us by your saving work. Through Christ our Lord.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

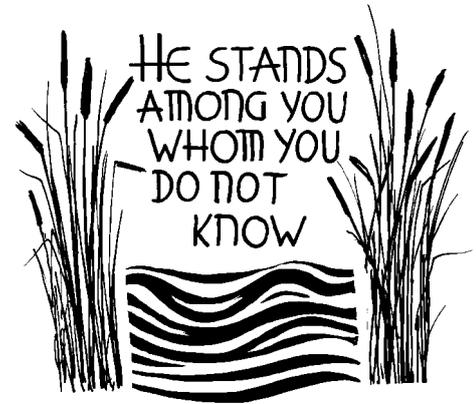
Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear.

Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We implore your mercy, Lord, that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults and prepare us for the coming feasts. Through Christ our Lord.

GOSPEL REFLECTION



What does it mean to be a light in today's world?

What are the characteristics of people who bring light into the lives of others? Who are people you know who bring light into the darkness today?

Do you have the courage to speak out when others use the name of Jesus for their own means and ends? Are you secure enough in your faith to challenge people who ridicule Christianity?

How does a faith community begin to look at itself and discern how spiritually healthy it is? How does a faith community change when they find they are not the Christian examples they should be?

What kind of life does your baptism call you to live? How can you learn to better live your baptism in everyday life?

What does today's Gospel reading have to do with preparing for Christmas? Does it make you want to change your observation of Advent? If so, how?

How can you bring the light of Jesus to the marginalized members of your community during this holiday season?

GOSPEL ACTION

Resolve to tell another person about how important your baptism is to you. Ask another person to share with you what their baptism means to them.

Readings – 4th Sunday of Advent Year B

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-5.8-12.14.16

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38



A PASTORAL LETTER

To be read at all Masses on the Third Sunday of Advent

13th December 2020

My dear brothers and sisters,

I write on a Sunday of great rejoicing, traditionally known as “Gaudete or Rejoice Sunday.” For the Mass begins with Saint Paul’s words which urge every Christian to rejoice.ⁱ Joy is the hallmark of the Christian life, a joy from which no one can be excluded.

The Church’s call to rejoice may seem discordant at the end of a year marked by so much anxiety, isolation and loss; and so we must recognise the source of our joy at Christmas. In the darkness and suffering of their own times, the prophets anticipated this joy; in today’s Gospel, the last of the prophets - Saint John the Baptist - announces that “*there stands among you – unknown to you – the One who is coming*”.ⁱⁱ Our joy is found then, in knowing and loving Christ our Lord. “*Rejoice in the Lord*” says the Apostle, for we will be joyful insofar as we recognise that “*the Lord is very near*”.ⁱⁱⁱ

It was a great sadness to see the doors of our churches close during Lent in co-operation with public health measures; yet we remained united in prayer by many and often creative means, until the return of the Mass and the Sacraments came with an outpouring of joy. Again, it came as a bitter blow last month when Parliament took the dangerous and unprecedented step of declaring public worship in England illegal. Yet this inspired across the Diocese, an equally unprecedented witness to the essential place of worship in our lives. Many of you wrote to Members of Parliament testifying how worship can never be reduced to the “non-essential.” This reminded of me of the Christians of the first centuries who had declared “*we cannot live without Sunday*.”^{iv} Neither can we live without the joy found in the Eucharist and the spirit of service and charity which flows from this Sacrifice and Sacrament. The Diocese might appear in some ways diminished at the end of a year of many trials, yet we have also surely grown stronger in that joy which nothing can take away.

Through the dark days of winter into brighter days ahead, we must keep alive the joy of our witness to the mystery of Christmas, God-with-us. We have turned to Saint Joseph as a guide as we emerge from this crisis, to learn how to remain in the joy of Christ's coming, the joy the Apostle describes today as knowing "*God has called us and will not fail us*".^v Pope Francis has called the whole Church to celebrate a *Year of Saint Joseph* until 8th December 2021. The Holy Father writes "*Each of us can discover Saint Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and guide in times of trouble*".^{vi}

In the circumstances of the first Christmas, we see how Our Lady and Saint Joseph were brought to near destitution; faced the threats of a homicidal ruler; and shared the plight of refugees in a strange land, yet never lost that unfailing joy which Christ's Nativity brought and the joy of remaining in His Presence. If this Christmas brings its own share of difficulties and disappointments for us, then we are in good company! Yet, nothing can take away the joy of recognising the One who is already in our midst, the Lord who is very near to us.

As we prepare for Christmas 2020 and the challenges of a New Year to come, a prayer addressing Saint Joseph with the words of Scripture might help us enter more deeply into the great joy of "Christ's Mass":

O Blessed Joseph, happy man, to whom it was given not only to see and hear the God whom many kings longed to see, but did not see, and longed to hear but did not hear; but you were privileged even to bear Him in your arms, to embrace Him, to clothe Him, and to watch over Him.

In the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, may we share the joy of Saint Joseph.

Wishing you all the joy of Christmas and a blessed New Year,

+ Mark

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Phil. 4:4

ⁱⁱ Jn. 1:27

ⁱⁱⁱ Phil. 4:5

^{iv} The Martyrs of Abitene, 304 AD

^v I Thess. 5:24

^{vi} Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* 8th December 2020

Bidding Prayers and Spiritual Communion

13th December 2020 – 3rd Sunday of Advent, Year B

As we continue to prepare a way for the Lord this Advent we offer our prayers to the Father:

For the Church and for Christians everywhere: may they prepare a way and be ready to welcome the Lord this Christmas time.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For political and community leaders; may they always bear in mind the needs of those who are the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all victims and survivors of abuse: may we as a Church listen attentively to them and help them find healing and peace in their lives.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who are sick, especially those affected by the coronavirus; may they know the grace and healing of Jesus.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who are hungry and the poor in our world; may we put our faith into action and be generous in sharing what we have with others this Advent.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For peace and an end to war, violence and hatred everywhere.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all the faithful departed especially **Mary McDonald, Albert Maguire, Dougie Laverie, Mal Charles** and all those who have died recently : **“Eternal rest grant upon them...”**

For those who mourn the loss of loved ones; may Christ’s message of hope in eternal life bring them comfort and consolation.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We ask Our Lady and all the Saints to join their prayers with ours as we say: **“Hail Mary...”**

God our loving Father,

We ask you to hear the prayers that we offer through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Bidding Prayers and Spiritual Communion
13th December 2020 – 3rd Sunday of Advent, Year B

Spiritual Communion

Prayer of St Alphonsus

My Jesus,
I believe that you are present in this Holy Sacrament of the altar.
I love you above all things and
I passionately desire to receive you into my soul.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
come spiritually into my soul
so that I may unite myself wholly to you now and forever.
Amen.