

## 12 December 2021 The Holy Communion – 2.3

### Hymn TIS 106 Now thank we all our God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. **And also with you.**

#### Sentence

Do not fear. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love. Zephaniah 3.16–17

#### Prayer of Preparation

**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.**

#### THE COLLECT

Almighty God, you sent your Son into a world where the wheat must be winnowed from the chaff and evil clings even to what is good: let the fire of your Spirit purge us of all corruption, so that, purified, we may wait eagerly for him whose coming is certain, whose Day draws near, your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

##### Zephaniah 3.14-20

<sup>14</sup> Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup> The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. <sup>16</sup> On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. <sup>17</sup> The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.' <sup>18</sup> 'I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. <sup>19</sup> At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honour in every land where they have suffered shame. <sup>20</sup> At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honour and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,' says the Lord.

Hear the word of the Lord, **Thanks be to God.**

##### A Song of Isaiah

'Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust and will not be afraid;  
'For the Lord God is my strength and my song: and has become my salvation.'  
With joy you will draw water: from the wells of salvation.  
On that day you will say: 'Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name;  
'Make known his deeds among the nations: proclaim that his name is exalted.  
'Sing God's praises, who has triumphed gloriously: let this be known in all the world.  
'Shout and sing for joy, you that dwell in Zion: for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.'

##### Philippians 4.4-7

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Hear the word of the Lord, **thanks be to God.**

## Luke 3.7-18

<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?' <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> The axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.' <sup>10</sup> 'What should we do then?' the crowd asked. <sup>11</sup> John answered, 'Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.' <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptised. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?' <sup>13</sup> 'Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them. <sup>14</sup> Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.' <sup>15</sup> The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, 'I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' <sup>18</sup> And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

This is the Gospel of the Lord, **praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

### Sermon

#### THE CREED

Let us together affirm the faith of the Church

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

#### THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

**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.**

#### PREPARATION

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3.16

#### Prayer of Approach

**We do not presume to come to 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 we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.**

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

The Lord comes, bringing to light things now hidden in darkness, and disclosing the purposes of the heart. Let us open our hearts and prepare for his coming, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

### Confession

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

**Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### Absolution

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## THE GREETING OF PEACE

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

## Hymn TIS 203 Fairest Lord Jesus

### OFFERTORY

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

**Blessed be God for ever.**

### THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, everliving God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ,

who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us.

By his death on the cross and rising to new life, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

We thank you that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world,

we may with joy behold his appearing, and in confidence stand before him

who redeems us from sin and death and makes us heirs of everlasting life.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven,

we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

**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.**

Holy and gracious God, all creation rightly gives you praise.

All life, all holiness, comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

whom you sent to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us,

to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

Hear us, merciful Lord; through Christ accept our sacrifice of praise;

and, by the power of your Word and Holy Spirit, sanctify this bread and wine,

that we who share in this holy sacrament may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

Who, when his hour had come, on the night before he went up to the cross to make full atonement for the sins of the whole world, offering once for all his one sacrifice of himself, took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after supper he took the cup and gave you thanks; he gave it to them, saying, '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.'

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Therefore, in obedience to his command, we commemorate and celebrate his saving passion and death, his mighty resurrection and ascension into heaven and we eagerly await his coming again in glory.

We thank you that by your grace alone you have accepted us in Christ; and here we offer you a spiritual sacrifice, holy and acceptable in your sight. Through Christ, receive this our duty and service, and grant that we who eat and drink these holy gifts may, by your Holy Spirit, be one body in Christ, and serve you in unity and peace.

In your grace and mercy, bring us to the joy of your eternal kingdom with all the company of the redeemed. May we praise you in union with them, and give you glory through your Son, Jesus Christ. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father eternal, in songs of never-ending praise:

**Blessing and honour and glory and power be yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

## **THE COMMUNION**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

The body of Christ [the bread of heaven] keep you in eternal life.

The blood of Christ [the cup of salvation] keep you in eternal life.

### **Prayer after Communion**

God for whom we wait, we thank you that you have fed us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation. As we joyfully await your Son, keep us ever watchful that we may be ready to stand before him on the day of his coming.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

### **Hymn TIS Fill my whole life**

#### **Blessing**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

#### **Dismissal**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen**

## **Zephaniah 3.14-20**

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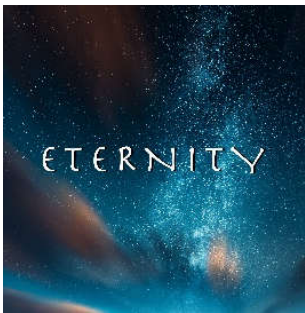
The third Sunday of advent, the Sunday of Joy.

So, what gives us Joy in this modern age. Is it something we can acquire along with all the other decorations and hang on our tree?

What is Joy? Mostly we think of joy as a kind of happiness, but Joy is not just happiness, not the fleeting kind of pleasure that comes from a treat, yummy food, a new piece of clothing or something new for the house, or the shed. Food is eaten and gone, things get old, that pleasure is fleeting.

There is joy in seeing children grow up and produce the next generation and for some of us even the generation after that, but people, even families can disappoint and let us down, sometimes they reject our values or even us and we are left with disappointment.

A career can be a life work and provide much satisfaction, especially when it is truly a calling and we know that we can do something worthwhile, but sometimes what we have done is torn down by others or simply not understood or appreciated.



Even as a teenager, I wasn't much of a party girl, I could never see the point of getting drunk, just for the sake of it. A little of your favourite tippie does no harm but not being able to remember what happened doesn't seem to be fun to me. To me, real satisfaction, has always come from a touch of eternal meaning. If I can make a difference in someone's life, can connect with the living God, that makes me glad. When God is doing something, and he lets me help that is the ultimate fun.

Being part of a timeless connection is what makes everything worthwhile. That is real joy. I am not always happy, sometimes I am stressed, disappointed or sad but I know that my God is real, he loves me, and I can trust him. That is the foundation of life.

I'm not sure if Joy is only an emotion, it seems to me that it is something deeper, more permanent, that transcends emotion. Perhaps it is like faith, you can feel faith but essentially it is a bedrock state of life. So, yes you can certainly feel joy, but it's more permanent, richer, and less reliant on circumstances than happiness. There are many times in the Bible where we are encouraged to rejoice, including our Old Testament reading from today. We are called to joy, not because everything is going well but because the Lord has defeated death and we know that he is in control and will bring everything to its completion. Yes, joy can bubble to the surface and feel very much like pleasure, like contentment but it is also something that sits in our soul and saves us from despair no matter what is happening in our lives or the world.



I wonder if John the Baptist was happy. It doesn't sound like it in today's passage. *You brood of vipers!* Doesn't sound like someone who is pleased. He had a very important message to bring and although it could bring joy it was certainly not a happy message.

But John knew that he was doing something of eternal significance, and I think that even as he waited in prison for his death, he would have been content. John made a difference in people's lives.

John had three basic themes which are all related. The first is a warning of the coming judgement, which leads to the second: a call for ethical reform and this is all necessary because of the announcement of the coming Messiah,



He warned them against assuming that just because they were descendants of Abraham, they were safe. He warned them that it was time to repent and live lives worthy of repentance. To show fruit in their lives. The metaphor of reformed or repentant living as 'good works' is common in ancient ethical teaching and in Jewish wisdom material. Ethnic heritage apart from righteousness, he insists, offers no assurance of salvation.

If you have a fruit tree and it produces no fruit you may well decide to get rid of it. To begin one puts the axe or the chain saw against the base of the tree to assess the right place to begin cutting. This is the last second before the tree feels the bite. A real tree can do nothing but, in this metaphor, John is warning his people that the need for action is now. It was not so long ago. Especially in Anglican Churches, that people were born Anglicans, went to church all their lives and assumed that made them Christians but never had a relationship with the living God. Just as John told the Jews that racial privilege meant nothing, our heritage also means nothing unless it is based on faith and.



The people hear John and ask for specific instructions. They already have hundreds of laws but John cuts through them all and gives them some general principles to apply in their lives: If you have more than you need, help someone who has less, don't use your position to defraud, extort or accuse falsely, live within your means. These are not meant to be new laws to be obeyed and then you're free to do whatever else you like; these are guidelines for one's attitude to others.

All John's answers call for an end to a lifestyle based on greed and the accumulation of material possessions. He addresses individual needs rather than social problems and focusses on the actions of each individual rather than society as a whole. Jesus said it more succinctly when he said, 'love your neighbour as yourself'.



The people recognised John as a prophet, could he be the Messiah? But John was quite clear: he was just the forerunner, the true Messiah would be the one to Baptise them with the Holy Spirit, he is the Son of God. The idea of the Messiah as judge as well as saviour was an important mainstream Jewish expectation; the Messiah would bring God's justice to the world, and this would involve naming and dealing with evil.



John speaks of the Messiah in terms of the fork and the fire: the farmer's fork, to separate the wheat from the chaff, and the fire that burns up the chaff once it is separated.

This is not a picture of Jesus that is popular today, we have put away those 'fire and brimstone' sermons and now we preach about God's love, but the truth is there is reality in both, and we need to recognise that unless we are to step right outside the biblical witness, judgement is one aspect of the truth that we need to take seriously.

So, John painted a picture of judgement, which is totally in line with the rest of the Bible, but it was and is a judgement which we can meet with confidence if we have loved the Lord our God and our neighbours as ourselves.



God needs to be just, or he isn't God, but he does love us so much he longs for us to come to him in repentance, that is why he allowed Jesus to come to earth so that we can be saved. There finally, is the message of Joy. If there is no judgement there is nothing to be saved from, Jesus came for nothing, and life is meaningless. We

have joy because we can be in relationship with the living God, and we can live with him and work with him every day.

That is what the prophet Zephaniah was talking about: <sup>14</sup> Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup> The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing.

That is why Paul was able to say:

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.



And we can say with Isaiah:

'Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust and will not be afraid; 'For the Lord God is my strength and my song: and has become my salvation.'

With joy you will draw water: from the wells of salvation.

On that day you will say:

'Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name;

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