

Welcome

Hymn - I cannot tell

I cannot tell why He whom angels worship
Should set His love upon the sons of men
Or why as Shepherd He should seek the wanderers
To bring them back they know not how or when
But this I know that He was born of Mary
When Bethlehem's manger was His only home
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured
And so the Saviour Saviour of the world is come

I cannot tell how silently He suffered
As with His peace He graced this place of tears
Or how His heart upon the cross was broken
The crown of pain to three and thirty years
But this I know He heals the broken-hearted
And stays our sin and calms our lurking fear
And lifts the burden from the heavy-laden
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here

I cannot tell how He will win the nations
How He will claim His earthly heritage
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of east and west of sinner and of sage
But this I know all flesh shall see His glory
And He shall reap the harvest He has sown
And some glad day His sun shall shine
in splendour When He the Saviour,
Saviour of the world is known

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship
When at His bidding every storm is stilled
Or who can say how great the jubilation
When all the hearts of men with love are filled
But this I know the skies will thrill with rapture
And myriad myriad human voices sing
And earth to heaven and heaven to earth will answer
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world is King

Greeting

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you. **And also with you**

Sentence of the Day

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Matthew 11:2-3

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Lord, have mercy on us, and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit

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.

Prayer of the Day

Sustain us Lord, with the power of your love, on our journey to meet the one who is coming: strengthen our weak hands, make firm our feeble knees, and open blind eyes to the dawning of your kingdom, so that our hearts may rejoice as we behold the majesty of our God. We ask this in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, on God, now and forever. **Amen**

The Ministry of the Word

Isaiah 35:1-10

¹ 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 splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor 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. "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 146

¹ Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul.

² **I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.**

³ Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.

⁴ **When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.**

⁵ Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

⁶ **He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever.**

⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free,

⁸ **the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.**

⁹ The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

¹⁰ **The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.**

James 5:7-10

⁷ Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Matthew 11:2-11

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ

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.

This is the gospel of the Lord: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Sermon - Doubt and Certainty

The Apostles' Creed

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 and his kingdom will have no end.

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

Thanksgiving for Offering

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

Prayers

Let us pray for the world and the church.

Response: Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer

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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

Exhortation

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we who would come to the holy communion of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ must consider how St Paul exhorts us to examine ourselves before presuming to eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For the benefit is great, if with a penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament. We then spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood; we dwell in Christ and he in us; we are one with Christ and Christ with us. Yet also the danger is great if we receive the bread and cup unworthily. Judge yourselves therefore, that you be not judged of the Lord. Repent truly of your sins, having a steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour. Amend your lives and love your neighbour.

Above all, give hearty thanks to God for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, truly God and truly human, who humbled himself to death

on the cross for us sinners, that he might make us children of God, and raise us to eternal life.

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to strengthen and comfort you. But first, let us make a humble confession of our sins to almighty God.

Confession

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all people, we acknowledge with shame the sins we have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against your divine majesty, provoking most justly your wrath and indignation against us.

We earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for all our misdoings. Have mercy on us, most merciful Father. For your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please you in newness of life, to the honour and glory of your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all who with hearty repentance and true faith turn to him: have mercy on you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hear the words of assurance for those who truly turn to Christ: If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the perfect offering for our sins. 1 John 2:1-2

Hymn TIS 203 - Fairest Lord Jesus

**Fairest Lord Jesus, Lord of all creation,
Son of God, and Mary's son:
you will I cherish, you will I honour, you are my soul's delight and crown.**

**Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands
robed in the greenness and bloom of spring:
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer, he makes the saddest heart to sing.**

**Fair are the flowers, fairer still the children
in all the freshness of youth arrayed;
yet is their beauty fading and fleeting; Lord Jesus, yours will never fade.**

**Fair is the moonlight, fairer still the sunshine,
fair is the shimmering starry sky:
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines clearer than all the heavenly host on high.**

**Jesus, all beauty, heavenly and earthly,
in you is wondrously found to be;
none can be nearer, fairer or dearer than you, my Saviour, are to me**

The Thanksgiving

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.**

It is indeed right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, Lord, Mighty Creator and Eternal God. 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 hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Glory to you, O Lord most high.

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.

All glory to you, our heavenly Father, for in your tender mercy you gave your only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death on the cross for our redemption: who made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and instituted, and in his holy gospel commanded us to continue, a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again.

Hear us, merciful Father, we humbly pray, and grant that we who receive these gifts of your creation, this bread and this wine, according to your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood; who on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given 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.' Likewise after supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you; for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' Amen.

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 with thanksgiving.

After Communion

Almighty and everliving God, we heartily thank you that you graciously feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and thus assure us of your favour and goodness towards us and that we are true members of the mystical body of your

Son, the blessed company of all faithful people, and are also heirs, through hope, of your eternal kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of your dear Son. And we humbly beseech you, heavenly Father, so to assist us with your grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as you have prepared for us to walk in, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, world without end.

Hymn TIS 558 All praise to thee, my God, this night

**Chorus: O What A Gift What A Wonderful Gift
Who Can Tell The Wonder Of The Lord
Let Us Open Our Eyes, Our Ears And Our Hearts
It Is Christ Our Lord, It Is He!**

In The Stillness Of The Night, When The World Was A Sleep

**The almighty word leapt out. He came to Mary, he came to us,
Christ came to the land of Galilee, Christ our Lord and our King *Chorus***

**On the night before he died It was Passover night
and he gathered his friends together. He broke the bread, he blessed the wine
It was the gift of his love and his life. Christ our Lord and our king *Chorus***

**On the hill of Calvary the world held its breath
for there for the world to see, God gave his Son his very own Son
for the Love of you and me. Christ our Lord and our king *Chorus***

**Early on that morning when the guards were sleeping
back to life came he. He conquered death He conquered sin
but the victory he gave to you and me. Christ our Lord and our king *Chorus***

**Some day with the saints we sill come before our Father
and then we will shout and dance and sing for in our midst for our eyes to see
will be Christ our Lord and our king. Christ our Lord and our king *Chorus***

Notices

Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

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

Sermon - Doubts and certainty - Matthew 11:2-11, Isaiah 35:1-10, James 5:7-10

I remember when I saw the acronym GOAT and how confused I was. It didn't help that I had a mate whose favourite form of friendly abuse was to call you a goat. It took me a while to realise that goat actually stood for Greatest Of All Time (which I didn't think my mate meant!) In Australia we tend not to celebrate greatness, instead we subscribe to the tall poppy syndrome - anyone who is too good is fair game to knock down a few pegs.

John the Baptist is the greatest prophet of all time up until Jesus, and he had a lot of competition by way of Moses, Elija, Isaiah and others! Jesus said that among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist. Even though Jesus considered John the greatest up until that point, he wasn't THE greatest of all time. Jesus also said whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. That means, that according to Jesus, that every one in this world who has put their faith in Jesus is greater than John. Nevertheless, it is still pretty high praise for John.

Even so, as we read today, John doubted who Jesus was. The greatest prophet doubted whether Jesus was the one God had promised!

He wasn't the only great Jew to have doubts. In the Old Testament reading, God commanded King Ahaz to ask for a sign. Ahaz was worried that Samaria, the country that had been the 10 northern tribes of Israel, was going to march on to Jerusalem with the nation of Aram. They wanted to destroy Ahaz's country Judah, and Ahaz had every reason to believe his country would succumb. He doubted they would be delivered even though God had prophesied it would. Ahaz had every reason to believe that his country would fall: they were up against two bigger, more powerful nations who had allied together. In the power politics of the day, Judah was an also-ran, so

it wasn't just Ahaz. No one thought Judah was safe any more. Ahaz thought he had real reason to doubt God's promise.

Getting back to John the Baptist, in our gospel reading today, John the Baptist had his own doubts. After hearing what Jesus had been doing, he sent his disciples³ to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

John had his doubts because Jesus wasn't doing the sorts of things John expected the Messiah, the one promised by God, to do. As I mentioned last week, many, apparently including John, were expecting a political Messiah, someone who would throw out the Romans, the latest in a long line of existential threats against the nation of Israel. The Romans were further threats in the line of Samaria and Aram. Jesus was very specifically not throwing them out.

Also, just before Jesus started his ministry, and before Jesus was baptised by John, John said that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork would be in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he would burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:16 (NIV)). Again, this didn't seem like Jesus. Jesus seemed much more a peaceful an of words than this brutal judge.

Today people don't just doubt God keeps his promises or that Jesus was the one God had promised. Many doubt that Jesus will return, which we spoke about a couple of weeks ago. People are saying what 2 Peter 3:4 said they will say: "Where is this 'coming' he promised? They will say that Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." Many people, and I am sad to say, some who call themselves Christians doubt whether Jesus will ever return.

So what do we do about these doubts - especially when they are also in our hearts?

Jesus told John's followers to go and tell John what they 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.

The truth was that Jesus was doing the things that were ushering a new age. Jesus healed the blind, the lame, lepers and the deaf, and even raised dead people. Jesus was not just some ordinary teacher, he had powers that only God could have given him.

More than this, these specific powers were ones that Isaiah had mentioned in the Old Testament. In his response to King Ahaz, God said through Isaiah: 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. He then stops quoting directly, but he gives the good news for the poor: Water will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

I know that this response was in the context of Judah's deliverance from Samaria and Aram, but God had the bigger picture in mind. God wasn't just thinking of the small nation of Judah, even if they were his special people. God was giving a sign for Ahaz about Judah, but he was also looking forward to when everybody could be one of his special people. He was looking forward to when he would usher in the new age by sending his son Jesus into the world to reunite the whole world to God. Time and again, God had made known his promises in his word, the Jewish scriptures, our Old Testament. As I mentioned last week, over 500 times God had foretold Jesus coming and the new age that was to come with perfectly restored relationships between God, humankind and creation. The new age will also see the abolition of all sickness and disease, including blindness, lameness, deafness and inability to speak.

We believe that Jesus was ushering in this age, and that it has not come about fully yet. There are still blind, lame, deaf and mute people. There are still poor and we know all too well there are still droughts. Yet, just as God promised Judah's deliverance from Aram and Samaria and it came about, just as God promised to send the

Messiah, his very own son Jesus and he came, so has God promised that Jesus will return.

After Peter warned about the scoffers who would scoff at the idea of Jesus returning, he said to rebuke them that long ago by God's word is full of changes: it was formed out of water and by water, it was destroyed by flood in the time of Noah, that now the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Peter reminds them that: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:5-9

Jesus did come in fulfilment of God's promise, and we can be certain he will return in fulfilment of God's promises. Like Ahaz, like John the Baptist, and like Peter's readers, we all may have our doubts from time to time, but we can also have certainty.

Yet as Isaiah said to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution and he will come to save you."

As Jesus said to John the Baptist: consider what you hear and see Jesus doing in his word in the world: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."

And remember what Peter said⁷ Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.

And as we said in our Psalm:⁶ The Lord, He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever.¹⁰ The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. This we can be certain of. Praise the LORD!