

**Sunday 8 December 2024 HC 2.1 - Advent 2**

**TIS 158 God has spoken by His prophets**

**God has spoken by His prophets, Spoken His unchanging Word  
Each from age to age proclaiming, God, the one the righteous Lord  
In the world's despair and turmoil, One firm anchor holds us fast  
God is King His throne eternal, God the first and God the last**

**God has spoken by Christ Jesus, Christ the everlasting Son  
Brightness of the Father's glory, With the Father ever one  
Spoken by the Word incarnate, God of God, ere time was born  
Light of light to earth descending, God revealed as Son of Man**

**God is speaking by His Spirit, Speaking to our hearts again  
In the age-long word expounding God's own message now as then  
Through the rise and fall of nations One sure faith yet standing fast  
God abides His Word unchanging. God the first and God the last**

**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.**

'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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.'

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

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

**Sentence of the Day**

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him. Luke 1:76

**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.**

**Prayer of the Day**

Merciful God, who sent your messenger John the Baptist to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation, give us grace to heed his warning and forsake our sins, that we may greet with you the coming of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

**Malachi 3.1-14**

<sup>1</sup> "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

<sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the

Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, <sup>4</sup> and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

<sup>5</sup> “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.

<sup>6</sup> “I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. <sup>7</sup> Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

<sup>8</sup> “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse —your whole nation—because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. <sup>11</sup> I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup> “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

<sup>13</sup> “You have spoken arrogantly against me,” says the LORD. “Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’

<sup>14</sup> “You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?’

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

### **Psalm: Luke 1:68-79**

<sup>68</sup> “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

<sup>69</sup> **He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David**

<sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

<sup>71</sup> **salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—**

<sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant,

<sup>73</sup> **the oath he swore to our father Abraham:**

<sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear

<sup>75</sup> **in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.**

<sup>76</sup> And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

<sup>77</sup> **to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,**

<sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

<sup>79</sup> **to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”**

### **Philippians 1:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

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

### **Luke 3:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— <sup>2</sup> during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in,

every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,

the rough ways smooth.

<sup>6</sup> And all people will see God's salvation.”

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

### **Sermon - John the Baptist**

#### **Question Time**

#### **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.**

#### **The Prayers of the People**

Let us pray for the world and the church

**Response:** Christ Jesus, intercede for us, and in your mercy. **Hear our 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.**

### **Scripture Sentence**

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive your trespasses. Mark 11:25

### **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.**

### **The Confession**

The Spirit of truth comes to convict us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. Let us open our hearts and 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.**

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.**

### **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 658 - Here I am Lord**

**Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.**  
**Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.**  
**Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love.**  
**Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.**  
**Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.**  
**Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.**  
**Take my silver and my gold, nothing, Lord, would I withhold.**  
**Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.**  
**Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.**

**Take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.**

**Take my love: my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store.**

**Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.**

### **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 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, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin, and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

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.**

Merciful God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine, and we pray that by your Word and Holy Spirit, we who eat and drink them may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

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

Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, and in whom, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father, in songs of never-ending praise:

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

### **The Holy Communion**

As this broken bread was once many grains, which have been gathered together and made one bread: so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

**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 with thanksgiving.

### **After Communion**

Gracious God, we thank you that in this sacrament you assure us of your goodness and love. Accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and help us to grow in love and obedience that we may serve you in the world and finally be brought to that table where all your saints feast with you for ever.

**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. Amen**

### Notices

#### Hymn - TIS 315 - mine Eyes have seen the glory

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
he has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword:  
his truth is marching on.

#### Chorus

Glory, glory, hallelujah, glory, glory, hallelujah,  
glory, glory, hallelujah, his truth is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
he is sifting out the hearts of all before his judgment seat:  
O be swift, my soul, to answer him; be jubilant, my feet!  
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
with a glory in his bosom which transfigures you and me:  
as he died to make us holy, let us live to make us free,  
while God is marching on.

He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave;  
he is wisdom to the mighty; he is succour to the brave:  
so the world shall be his foot-stool, and the soul of time his slave:  
our God is marching on.

### Blessing

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**

### Dismissal

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

## Sermon - Who is He? - John the Baptist - Advent 2

Are you a fan of Westerns? Many cowboy movies have a mysterious stranger, someone with no background who rides into town and has everyone wondering who he is, whether he will save the town or perhaps ride away just when he is needed most. Sometimes the mysterious stranger is actually the bad guy, but whoever he is, he keeps people guessing. John the Baptist fills the trope of the mysterious stranger in the gospels, even though Luke, the author of our reading this morning, doesn't fully follow the convention.

John wasn't told that he should not tell us a lot of John the Baptist's background. He tells us his father was Zechariah, his mother was Elizabeth, and back in chapter 1, we read the full story of John's unusual birth - Elizabeth had not been able to conceive, and she and her husband were quite old when John was born. An angel had actually told Zechariah he and Elizabeth would have a son, and Zechariah then couldn't speak until after John was born. As if to clarify things, the angel also said that "many will rejoice because of his birth,<sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.<sup>16</sup> He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.<sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:14-17

Now, this may have been meant to clarify things, but if I were Zechariah, it would have left me with more questions than before the angel spoke to me. And people kept asking who John was: and as soon as he was born they asked why he was called John instead of being named after his father, and they were asking "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him. Luke 1:66

John answered with a song of praise, a song we read as our psalm this morning. As we reading it, you may have heard Zechariah start out with a really impressive description when he sang:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.<sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David<sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),<sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—<sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant,<sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham:<sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."

When I read that, I thought 'wow, Zechariah is saying some impressive stuff: coming to his people to redeem them, salvation from enemies, we'll serve him without fear. ..

But then you get to the next line, Zechariah says but ... you my child shall be called the prophet of the most high - Zechariah hadn't been talking about John, but someone else.

When he starts to talk about John, all he says is that he will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,<sup>77</sup> to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Somehow, John was to prepare the way for the Lord by giving people knowledge of their salvation through the forgiveness of their sins - but again, we get no background, no reason John should be able to give to this knowledge, or this forgiveness.

And then, we don't hear from John until he starts his preaching ministry. Even then, the people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts who John might be and if John might possibly be the Messiah. Luke 3:15

You may have noticed why people keep asking if John is Elijah, and wondered about this. Elijah was a prophet in Northern Israel about 900 BC. He defended the worship of YAHWEH against the Baal worship, performed many miracles, and didn't die, but ascended directly to heaven. Luke said John came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and in John 1 the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask John if he was the Elijah. Jesus himself is asked a few times if he is Elijah, and this is all because of the last verse of our Old Testament, Malachi 4:5,6 which say<sup>5</sup> "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.<sup>6</sup> And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." Jews of Jesus's day were expecting this prophecy to be fulfilled, and so they were wondering if John was Elijah. John actually denied that he was Elijah, but Jesus is quite clear that John was the Elijah was to come.

In any case, the mystery about John continues. Later, John was imprisoned by Herod, and even Jesus' disciples asked Jesus who he was. Jesus replied: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>25</sup> If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. <sup>26</sup> But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup> This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

Finally we are starting to get some answers about who John is: John is a prophet - someone who proclaims God's message.

In this passage Jesus quotes a different Old Testament prophets to the one Luke mentioned in our reading. They both said John has come to prepare the way of the



Lord, but Jesus quotes Malachi, and Luke quotes Isaiah. The term, 'the Lord' was often used as the polite way of saying God (since the Jews didn't want to offend God by using his name directly), and so whoever John was preparing the way for, he was very closely associated with God.

And the way that John prepares people for God's coming is by calling them to repent of their sins - to turn back their lives to God's way.

In a couple of places, we are told that John is really important. Obviously, preparing the way for the coming of the Lord is hugely important, and Jesus himself says among those born of women there is no one greater than John in Luke chapter 7.

Yet, on the other hand, John himself says he is not worthy even to untie Jesus's sandal straps, and Jesus says the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

While everyone around John is saying "Who is he?" John himself and Jesus know that this isn't the important question, no matter how great John may appear to be. In the scheme of this world, John is hugely important, preparing people for Jesus the son of God himself to come.

Yet, in the scheme of the Kingdom of God, John is nothing. As Jesus said, even the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John. The question about John, the mysterious stranger should not be "Who is he", because ultimately he is nothing.

The question really needs to be "Who is this Jesus, the Lord that John is preparing the way for." And the even more important question for us is "Am I ready to meet the Lord?"

Are you?