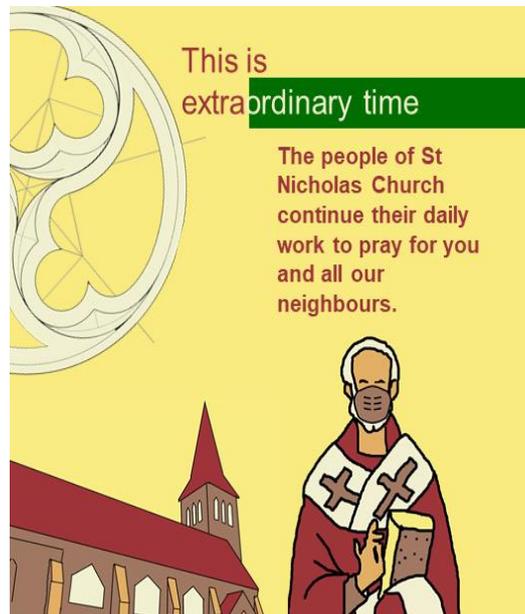


Worship at St. Nicholas, Sutton
For the 3rd Sunday of Advent, 13 December 2020
Collect, hymns, readings & sermon



Collect (prayer of the week)

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymns

Opening *Tell out, my soul*

Gradual *The angel Gabriel*

Readings

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11

The Good News of Deliverance

61 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

⁸ For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

1 Thessalonians 5.16-24

Final Exhortations, Greetings, and Benediction

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³ May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

John 1.6-8, 19-28

The Word Became Flesh, The Testimony of John the Baptist

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' ²¹And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' ²²Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' ²³He said,

'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
"Make straight the way of the Lord" ',
as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' ²⁶John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Sermon from the Bishop of Croydon, the Right Revd Jonathan Clark, for Advent 3 2020

Paul is so unrealistic. Rejoice always, he says, in the New Testament reading set for today. Always? Even in 2020? I'm sure a lot of us are pretty glad the year will soon be over, and we're hoping for better things from 2021. But rejoicing right now? Some of us have our own illnesses or our own bereavements to grieve: those precious individuals who get lumped together into that number called 'excess deaths', or our own long COVID with its unknown future consequences. Many of us have had our livelihoods threatened, and all of us have had our lives disrupted. Across the world the suffering has been intense and the economic consequences disastrous. How can we rejoice? But that is what we're commanded to do, especially today: the Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally known as Gaudete Sunday, from the Latin verb for "rejoice". This is 'Rejoice Sunday'.

It's also the day on which we reflect on John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, but not generally associated with rejoicing. But remember the Baptist's words in the third chapter of John's gospel: "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him." He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.'" The coming of Jesus, even as it signals the end of John's ministry, fills him with joy as he sees God's purposes being fulfilled.

Joy is a response, something that can only arise in us unbidden. We cannot choose to be joyful because it is in the nature of joy, as in the title of C S Lewis' autobiography, that we are surprised by it, not in control of it. Joy does not calculate or balance one thing against another. To experience joy even when there is also much cause for sadness, does not deny grief; to be joyful in the face of injustice does not contradict anger. What joy does contradict is fear: just like love, joy casts out fear.

Joy does not contradict the unhappiness of our world, but provides us with a resource to fight it. If we are sucked into a basic despair about the condition of humanity or of our planet, there is nothing to give us strength in working for the world to be better. Joy is the response to what we are already given that opens up to us a better way of living. Joy is the response to the miracle of goodness, of love and beauty whenever we find it, even in the middle of illness, even during a pandemic. It is the human response to the miracle of God.

Joy is the concrete sign in the present of the hope that Christians have in the future. It is the experience in the now of what we believe God intends for all of creation in the fullness of time. As such, joy is more than a feeling – it is something quite beyond mere happiness. It is a reality that exists as part of the Christian belief in the incarnation of Christ. Christ has come in the flesh; therefore there is cause for joy in the world. Christ is risen; therefore there is hope. It is in that sense that we can be commanded to rejoice. It can't mean that we have to have the experience of joy in every moment of our life, because that is exactly the state for which we long and hope, that is the life of the kingdom which we know only too well is not yet fulfilled. But we can be ready and responsive. Strengthened by the good news of Christ, we can take the risk of being open to the world around us, which means being

open to the sorrow and also to the joy. The opposite is to be closed off, to try not to be affected, which is the way to emotional and spiritual starvation and death.

The more we are open to joy, the more joyful the world is. Joy is magnified and reflected in our experience of it – it's not something we would want to keep to ourselves. There's not a set quantity of joy in the world – it can multiply, or it can be killed off. If we are just left to ourselves, sometimes we'll be overtaken by joy, sometimes by its enemies of fear or despair. It is in Christ that we are enabled to see joy, to share joy, not as a random feature of a chaotic world, but as part of the hidden reality, the underlying purpose of the God who will finally reconcile us all in the joyful kingdom.

John the Baptist's role as a joyful witness to Jesus makes him a great Advent figure. His witness not only prepares the way for Jesus but also provides an example for us. We stand up and say what we know to be the truth about God and about Jesus. We stand beside John the Baptist and the other great characters of the Fourth Gospel, and bear witness to what we know and believe about the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. In this witness we can and should "rejoice always." **Amen.**

I encourage you to make a habit of daily prayer, whether *A Way of Daily Prayer* (attached, or on website under Useful Information-Service Sheets); Common Worship *Daily Prayer* <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>; or *Book of Common Prayer*.

Bible readings for Morning and Evening Prayer:

Sunday 13 December 3rd Sunday of Advent

MP Isaiah 12, Luke 1.57-66

EP Malachi 3.1-4; 4, Philippians 4.4-7

Monday 14 December John of the Cross, poet, teacher of the faith, 1591

MP Isaiah 49.14-25, 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11

EP Isaiah 38.1-8, 21-22, Matthew 16.13-end

Tuesday 15 December

MP Isaiah 50, 1 Thessalonians 5.12-end

EP Isaiah 38.9-20, Matthew 17.1-13

Wednesday 16 December

MP Isaiah 51.1-8, 2 Thessalonians 1

EP Isaiah 39, Matthew 17.14-21

Thursday 17 December

MP Isaiah 51.9-16, 2 Thessalonians 2

EP Zephaniah 1.1-2.3, Matthew 17.22-end

Friday 18 December

MP Isaiah 51.17-end, 2 Thessalonians 3

EP Zephaniah 3.1-13, Matthew 18.1-20

Saturday 19 December

MP Isaiah 52.1-12, Jude

EP Zephaniah 3.14-end, Matthew 18.21-end