

Magnificat <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpOrkZSnv6Q>

Prayer:- God, you are a wonderful God!

You take care of those whose hearts are broken; you give comfort to those who mourn.

Let us rejoice in the Lord. **Let us exult in our God**

You bring Good News to those who think they are worthless

You help those who feel imprisoned to break free.

Let us rejoice in the Lord. **Let us exult in our God**

You love justice and hate all that is wrong, your promise lasts forever.

Let us rejoice in the Lord. **Let us exult in our God**

You have brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

You have filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Let us rejoice in the Lord. **Let us exult in our God. Amen**

Hymn:- Tell out my soul <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3E7QWLyDWe8>

Relection:- Today is 'Gaudete' Sunday because the readings, including the Magnificat, set for this Sunday are full of rejoicing. Perhaps this year, more than any other, our hearts are longing for news of joy and happiness. Mary is singing of God's deliverance and hope; she has heard the words of Gabriel and of Elizabeth, and she trusts God. It is easy for us in today's culture to be focused solely on our own generation – and our children, perhaps. In Mary's time, there is a sense of generational time—of seeing God's faithfulness through the ancient stories of the faith and knowing God's presence is the same even if experienced differently; knowing that God's faithfulness is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow is even more important. We are not patient. We demand quick fixes and solutions now. God does not work that way. We need to be less concerned about things that are troubling now and have been troubling for a relatively short time and be more concerned about things that effect multiple generations: pollution continues to be a concern. War continues to be a concern. HIV/AIDS continues to be a concern, as does malaria, famine and poverty – which account for more deaths than Covid.

John's Gospel tells us of the coming of John the Baptist, the proclaimer of who Jesus was: the Messiah, the Son of God. John comes before Jesus to prepare the way for the message of Christ.

John came into the wilderness – not just a wilderness of stones and barren places,

But a wilderness of wrong, shortsightedness and selfishness.

A wilderness of people not knowing the way to go. He came to tell of the light.

John comes into our wilderness – not just a wilderness of frantic life and shattered dreams,

But a wilderness of wrong, shortsightedness and selfishness.

A wilderness of people not knowing the way to go. He comes to bring us light.

John comes to bring news of the light - not just a light to brighten the dark and barren places,

But a light to kindle hope, to set us on fire, to be a beacon for people not knowing the way to go.

Reading:- John 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Hymn:- On Jordan's bank <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plr21lLgFpg>

Prayer:- God, you have prepared everything for us,

Sent the prophets, called us to repentance

Entered the world as a human being,

Challenged us to follow you, and filled us with the holy spirit

Loving God, we still don't respond to the call of John the Baptist as we ought –

We are deaf to your voice, and blind to the signs of your coming

We live as if we are not expecting you

We are not obedient to your will.

We confess that we are often too busy with preparing for festivities to give time to thinking about what it all means and preparing ourselves.

We try to pretend that our preparation of material things is our way of acknowledging your birth,

But deep in our hearts we know these thoughts are shallow and unworthy.

In many ways we make Christmas less than it might be by not giving enough thought to the real meaning of your coming.

Lord forgive us and fill us with anticipation of your coming

As we prepare for Christmas this year, may we not lose sight of the Christ of Christmas.

Help us to make Jesus the focus of all that we do

To sing of his coming in carols, to show his love in charity

To find space in our busyness to think of him. Amen

Reflection:- John's whole purpose was that of **preparation**. Even though he was actually a considerable person in his own right, he is presented here as the prophesied messenger who was to come to prepare a way for the Lord. John was relatively unimportant – it was his message that mattered. John's **proclamation** is one of repentance and baptism which are preparatory rites.

John was the son of a priest, and that made him a priest too, but he was not acting like one, which is why some of the other priests were asking questions about him. He was proving a popular preacher and the pharisees may have been concerned that he was a false prophet. The Jews were waiting for a Messiah and there was also a belief that Elijah, or some other great prophet, would herald his coming – but John was not claiming to be anything other than a voice calling to prepare the way.

So then they ask why he is baptising – a ritual that normally only gentiles were expected to undergo when wishing to convert to Judaism. John does not really answer why, but the inference is that although they are the chosen race they still need to be cleansed to be ready for the one who was to come - a cleansing of bodies in water as a sign of the cleansing of souls, in preparation for baptism with the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for repent means literally to change ones' mind but the Hebrew word from the OT means more 'to turn back', in other words they were to return to God's way and rededicate themselves to following it with the **promise** that God will forgive their sins.

John the Baptist challenged people to live differently and to prepare for a "Baptism in the Spirit" which would radically change them from the inside out. God's saving restoring work must always embrace our entire lives, our entire experience and our entire being. This means that as much as our hearts need to be changed, so too do our structures and systems. It is God who does the work of restoration, but we are invited to be voices proclaiming God's coming, and be participants in God's saving work. Restoration is a huge concern in our world right now. There is the restoration of the nations where dictators have been overthrown, where wars have devastated cities, where millions of people have been displaced, and rebuilding **must** happen. There is the restoration of economic systems that have almost collapsed because of the global covid crisis. There is the restoration of our damaged planet and wildlife. On other levels there are issues around the restoration of families, communities, and, particularly for us, the restoration and furtherance of the Christian faith. In many of these conversations, the nature of restoration is polarised between internal and external facets. Those who work for restoration may even be categorised or stereotyped in terms of the whether their focus is on changing hearts and people or changing systems and structures. But these are false dichotomies. We cannot hope to address the great challenges of our time without a deep, revolutionary change of our hearts, minds and attitudes. But, equally, we cannot hope to find answers if we keep the same systems and structures and actions that have created our crises in the first place. As followers of Christ we are called to deal with both realities – the internal and the external. So as we work for peace and justice, we also embrace the call to work with love and compassion to reconnect with God as we pray that God will continue to come to us and bring God's reign into visible manifestation among us and through us.

Hymn:- Christ you call us all to service <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bS7Pg4nazvw>

Christ, you call us all to service,
call us all who follow you;
plant in us a deep commitment
all your work and will to do.

Fire a passion for your justice,
in us kindle love of peace;
help us heal the brokenhearted,
to the captive bring release.

Teach us how to work together,
brothers, sisters, side by side,
equal partners in the struggle,
in the cause of truth allied.

To each one some gift is given,
man or woman, young or old--
help us use each skill and talent
your great purpose to unfold.

Let us be a servant people,
reconciling, ending strife,
seeking ways more just of sharing
and of ord'ring human life.

Fill us with a glowing vision
of this world as it should be;
send us forth to change that vision
into blest reality. (Joy Patterson)

Prayer:-

When it seems that all is lost, that our brokenness, our failure, has gone too far,
You, God, call a new day to dawn.
When it feels like hope is foolish, that darkness and despair are the only true realities,
You, God, call the sun to rise.
When we think we're alone and abandoned, that life is nothing but pain and emptiness and
meaninglessness,
You, God, arrive among us again.
God of Advent and of Restoration,
we praise you for every new day that absorbs the darkness;
for every rising sun that calls the night to end;
for every messenger of hope and forgiveness that baptises us with your love.

In a world where we are tempted to see so many of our challenges as dead-ends,
we pray for a new vision, a new heart and a new commitment
to prepare the way for your reign, and for the liberation, justice and peace that you bring.

Come, reveal yourself in our world, in our community, in your church
Reveal yourself and your love through us
Reveal yourself, that all may know you in their need
come with your all sufficient love
to the sick and anxious, to those whose lives are overshadowed with sorrow...
As we prepare the way for you to reign, on earth, as in heaven

Advent is for waiting;

Waiting for the Lord
In silence and stillness.

Advent is for watching

To see what Christ is doing in the world
And watching for when he comes.

Advent is for preparing

Preparing ourselves so we are ready to recognise and respond to him
When he comes.

Hymn:- Come thou long expected Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEEed0uWnDGs>

'Like a candle flame' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teZaQUKjx24>