



St Paul's Church, Knightsbridge
The Diocese of London



The Solemn Eucharist
The Second Sunday of Advent

8th December 2013 at 11 a.m.

Welcome to St Paul's Knightsbridge, part of the Diocese of London and a church of the worldwide Anglican Communion. If you are visiting us from another church, please make yourself known to the sidesmen or to one of the clergy after the service. Members of all Christian churches are welcome to share with us in this Eucharist – and those who do not wish to receive the Sacrament are invited to approach the altar at the time of Communion, to receive a blessing.



There is a loop system in the lower parts of the church for the benefit of the hearing-impaired. Hearing aid users should switch their devices to 'T'.

giftaid it

During the service a collection will be taken for the work of the church in this parish, throughout the Diocese of London and further afield. Please use the special envelopes at the end of each pew to maximise your giving through the 'Giftaid' scheme.



Members of the congregation are asked to ensure that mobile phones are switched off (or to silent) and are reminded that the taking of photographs or the making of audio or video recordings during services is prohibited.

*Cover image
St John the Baptist
Donatello (c 1386 - 1466)*

ORDER OF SERVICE

The Introductory Rite

The Choir, Servers and Sacred Ministers enter from the West doors and process to cense the High Altar. All stand:



The Choir sings:

Drop down ye heavens from above,
and let the skies pour down righteousness.

All repeat:

**Drop down ye heavens from above,
and let the skies pour down righteousness.**

Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: thy holy cities are a wilderness; Sion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation: our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee.

**Drop down ye heavens from above,
and let the skies pour down righteousness.**

Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know me and believe me: I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me is no Saviour: and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

**Drop down ye heavens from above,
and let the skies pour down righteousness.**

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; my salvation shall not tarry: I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions: fear not, for I will save thee: for I am the Lord thy God, the holy one of Israel, thy redeemer.

**Drop down ye heavens from above,
and let the skies pour down righteousness.**

THE GREETING

When all are in their places the Celebrant says:

**✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
and with thy spirit.

THE PRAYERS OF PENITENCE AND KYRIE ELEISON

The Deacon says:

When the Lord comes,
he will bring to light those things now hidden in darkness,
and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
Therefore in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.

All kneel and, in silence, call to mind sins and failings.

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against thee
and against our neighbour,
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are heartily sorry and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us, forgive us all that is past,
and grant that we may serve thee in newness of life
to the glory of thy name.
Amen.**

The Choir sings:
Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Missa 'Mon Coeur se recommande à vous' – Orlande de Lassus (1532-1594)

The Celebrant says:

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

All stand with the Celebrant.

THE COLLECT

The Celebrant introduces a period of silent prayer:

Let us pray.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee,
thy power and come among us,
and with thy great might succour us:
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are sore let and hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
thy bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through the satisfaction of thy Son, our Lord,
to whom, with thee and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever,
now and for ever.

Amen.

All sit.

THE FIRST READING

Isaiah 11: 1-10

A reading from the prophecy of Isaiah.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

At the end:

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The choir sings:

THE PSALMODY

Give the King thy judgements, O God :
and thy righteousness unto the King's son.

Then shall he judge thy people according unto right :
and defend the poor.

The mountains also shall bring peace :
and the little hills righteousness unto the people.

He shall keep the simple folk by their right :
defend the children of the poor, and punish the wrong doer.
They shall fear thee, as long as the sun and moon endureth :
from one generation to another.

He shall come down like the rain into a fleece of wool :
even as the drops that water the earth.

In his time shall the righteous flourish :
yea, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth.

Blessed be the Lord God, even the God of Israel :
which only doeth wondrous things ;

And blessed be the Name of his Majesty for ever :
and all the earth shall be filled with his Majesty. Amen, Amen..

Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19

THE SECOND READING

The Letter of Paul to the Romans 15: 4-13

A reading from Paul's letter to the Romans.

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit..

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

All stand.

THE GRADUAL HYMN (t 450)

Lamb of God, to thee we raise
hymns of holy love and praise,
for the saint and prophet born
to be herald of the morn.

Like the morning star he rose
thine appearing to disclose,
like an ensign lifted high
he declared thy kingdom nigh.

Mighty preacher, by whose word
souls to penitence were stirred,
those who long in sin had strayed
then the call divine obeyed.

Make us, Lord, like him to be
fearless witnesses for thee,
faithful unto death be found,
and at last by thee be crowned.

Words: William Edgar Enman, 1908
Music: 'Orientis partibus', French medieval melody

All remain standing.

THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

The Cantor sings:



Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight:
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 3: 1-12

The Deacon says:

The Lord be with you

And with thy spirit.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, according to Matthew.

Glory be to thee, O Lord.

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." ' Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to thee, O Christ.

THE SERMON

The Reverend Andrew Sloane

Associate Vicar

Silence is kept.

THE CREED

All stand with the Celebrant, who says:

Let us make affirmation of our faith.

**I believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible:
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of light,
very God of very God, begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost
of the Virgin Mary, and was made man,
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried,
and the third day he rose again
according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.
And he shall come again with glory
to judge both the quick and the dead:
whose kingdom shall have no end.
And I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together
is worshipped and glorified,
who spake by the prophets.
And I believe One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.
And I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

All remain standing.

THE PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father.

All kneel. Either of the following responses may be used:

Lord in thy mercy or Lord, hear us
hear our prayer Lord, graciously hear us.

For the departed, these words may be used:

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord
and let light perpetual shine upon them.
May they rest in peace
and rise in glory.

At the end, a brief period of silence is kept for personal prayer. All say:

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers for the sake of thy Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.**
Amen.

THE NOTICES

All stand.

THE PEACE

The Celebrant says:

In the tender mercy of our God,
the dayspring from on high shall break upon us,
to give light to those who dwell in darkness
and in the shadow of death
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
and with thy spirit.

The Deacon says:

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

All exchange a sign of peace with those standing close by.

THE OFFERTORY

The gifts of the people are carried to the altar and presented. A collection is taken to support our work, ministry and charitable giving. Please use the Gift Aid envelopes provided, remembering to fill in all the details. The altar is prepared and the gifts of bread and wine, the altar, and the sanctuary party are censed.

THE COLLECTION HYMN (12)

**On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Come then and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings from the King of kings.**

**Then cleansed be every Christian breast,
And furnished for so great a guest!
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.**

**For thou art our salvation, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without thy grace our souls must fade,
And wither like a flower decayed.**

**Stretch forth thine hand to heal our sore,
And make us rise, to fall no more;
Once more upon thy people shine,
And fill the world with love divine.**

**All praise, eternal Son, to thee
Whose advent sets thy people free,
Whom, with the Father, we adore,
And Spirit blest, for evermore. Amen.**

Words: Charles Coffin (1676-1749)

Music: 'Winchester New', adapted from a chorale

*When the Thurifer approaches, all stand to be censed.
After being censed, all remain standing for the Eucharistic Prayer.*

THE OFFERTORY ANTHEM

Benedictis (Short Service)
Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)

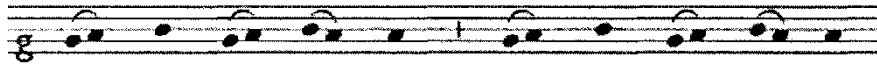
Blessed be the Lord God of Israel : for he hath visited and redeemed his people; and hath raised up a mighty salvation for us : in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy Prophets : which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies : and from the hand of all that hate us. To perform the mercy promised to our forefathers : and to remember his holy Covenant; to perform the oath which he sware to our forefather Abraham : that he would give us; that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies : might serve him without fear; in holiness and righteousness before him : all the days of our life.

And thou, Child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest : for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people : for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God : whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us; to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death : and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

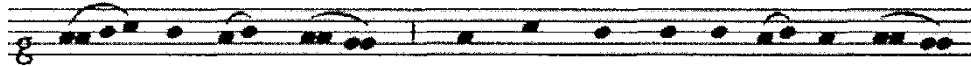
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end.
Amen.

Words from Luke 1 vv.68-79

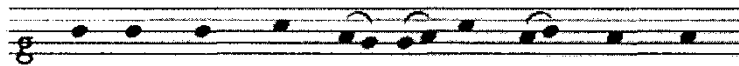
THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER



The Lord be with you ^{R.} and with thy spi-rit.



Lift up your hearts. ^{R.} **We lift them up un-to the Lord.**



Let us give thanks un - to the Lord our God.



^{R.} **It is meet and right so to do.**

It is very meet, right and our bounden duty,
that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto thee,
O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God,
through Jesus Christ, thine only Son, our Lord.

For he is thy living Word;
through him thou hast created all things from the beginning,
and fashioned us in thine own image.
Through him thou didst redeem us from the slavery of sin,
giving him to be born of a woman, to die upon the cross, and to rise again
for us. Through him thou hast made us a people for thine own
possession, exalting him to thy right hand on high,
and sending forth through him thy holy and life-giving Spirit.

And now we give thee thanks
because thou didst send him to redeem us from sin and death
and to make us inheritors of everlasting life;
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 may stand before him.

Therefore with angels and archangels,
and with all the company of heaven,
we laud and magnify thy glorious name,
evermore praising thee and saying:

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth,
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua, Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Glory be to thee, O Lord most high. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the
Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*

Missa 'Mon Coeur se recommande à vous' – Orlande de Lassus (1532-1594)

Accept our praises, heavenly Father, through thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus
Christ, and as we follow his example and obey his command,
grant that by the power of thy Holy Spirit
these gifts of bread and wine may be unto us his body and his blood;
who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread;
and when he had given thanks to thee,
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 to thee, he gave it to them, saying:

Drink ye all of this; for this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.

Wherefore, O Lord and heavenly Father,
we remember his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross;
we proclaim his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension;
we look for the coming of his kingdom and with this bread and this cup
we make the memorial of Christ, thy Son, our Lord.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died:

Christ is risen:

Christ will come again.

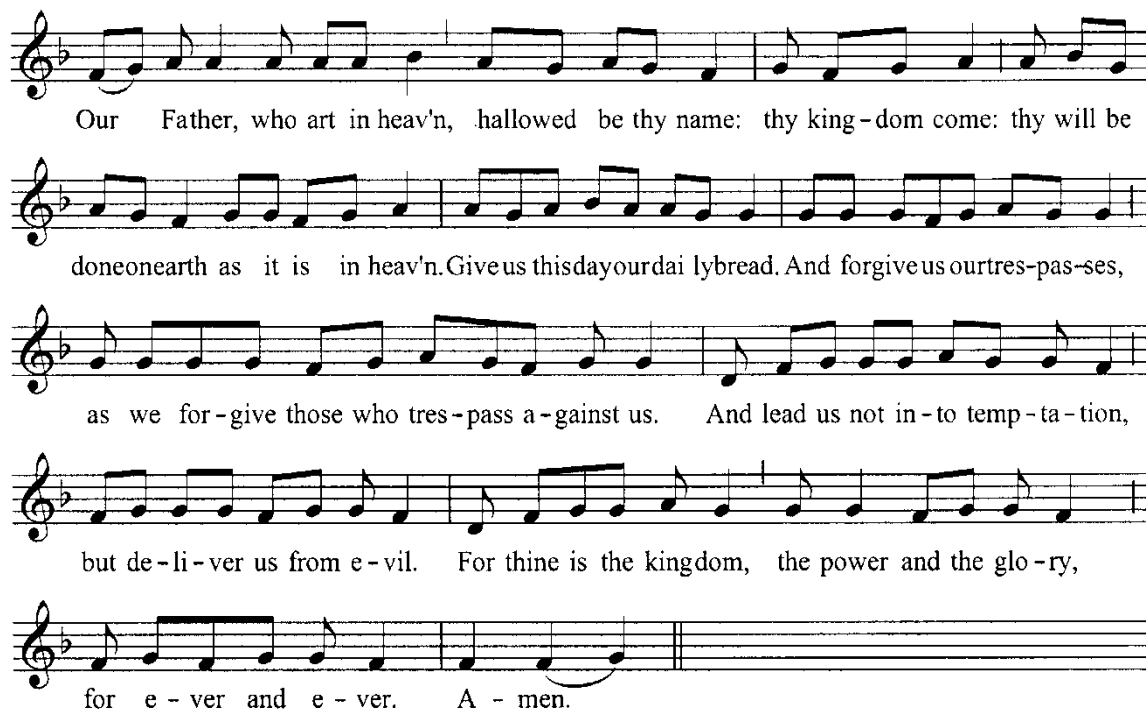
Accept through him, our great high priest, this our sacrifice of thanks and
praise, and as we eat and drink these holy gifts in the presence of thy
divine majesty, renew us by thy Holy Spirit, inspire us with thy love, and
unite us in the body of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
by whom, and with whom, and in whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory be unto thee,
O Father almighty, world without end. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

All kneel. The Celebrant sings:

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us.

All sing:



Our Father, who art in heav'n, hallowed be thy name: thy king-dom come: thy will be
done on earth as it is in heav'n. Give us this day our dai ly bread. And forgive us our tres-pas-ses,
as we for-give those who tres-pass a- gainst us. And lead us not in-to temp-ta-tion,
but de-li-ver us from e-vil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glo-ry,
for e-ver and e-ver. A-men.

THE FRACTION

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated bread, saying:

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

THE GIVING OF HOLY COMMUNION

By way of invitation to receive the Sacrament the Celebrant says:

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Blessed are those who are called to his supper.

**Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof,
but speak the word only and my soul shall be healed.**

*The Sacred Ministers and Servers receive the Holy Communion, followed by the people, beginning with those seated at the front of the Nave.
All who normally do so in their own Church are invited to receive the Sacrament.
Those who do not wish to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion are invited to approach the altar to receive a blessing, carrying this booklet in their hands as an indication to the Priest.*

The choir sings:

AGNUS DEI

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Donna nobis pacem.*

*O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace.*

Missa 'Mon Coeur se recommande à vous' – Orlande de Lassus (1532-1594)

COMMUNION ANTHEM

*This is the record of John
Orlando Gibbons (1585-1625)*

*This is the record of John,
when the Jews sent priests and Levites
from Jerusalem to ask him,
Who art thou?
And he confessed and denied not,
and said plainly,
I am not the Christ.*

*And they asked him,
What art thou then? Art thou Elias?
And he said, I am not.
Art thou the prophet?
And he answered, No.*

*Then said they unto him,
What art thou? that we may give an answer*

unto them that sent us.
What sayest thou of thyself?
And he said, I am the voice of him that
crieth in the wilderness,
Make straight the way of the Lord.

Words: from the Gospel of John 1: 19-23

PRAYERS AFTER COMMUNION

The Celebrant introduces a period of silent prayer.

Let us pray.
All kneel.

Heavenly Father,
who didst send thy Son to redeem the world
and wilt send him again to be our judge:
give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first coming
that when he shall come again,
we may be found ready to greet him
with joyful love and steadfast faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Almighty God,
we thank thee for feeding us
with the body and blood of thy Son, Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer thee our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of thy Spirit
to live and work to thy praise and glory. Amen.
All stand.

THE CONCLUDING HYMN (5)

Hark! a herald voice is calling:
'Christ is nigh,' it seems to say;
'Cast away the dreams of darkness,
O ye children of the day!'

Lo! the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven;

So when next he comes in glory,
And earth's final hour draws near,
May he then as our defender
On the clouds of heaven appear.

Honour, glory, virtue, merit,
To the Father and the Son,
With the co-eternal Spirit,
While unending ages run. Amen.

*Words from the Latin Vox clara ecce intonat, tr. E. Caswall (1814-78)
Tune: 'Merton' by W. H. Monk (1823-89)*

All remain standing.

The Concluding Rite

THE BLESSING & THE DISMISSAL

The Celebrant says:

The Lord be with you **and with thy spirit.**

Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shine upon you, scatter the darkness before your path, 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, come upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

The Deacon says:

Go in the peace of Christ. **Thanks be to God.**

All remain standing as the Servers and Sacred Ministers depart.

ORGAN VOLUNTARY

NOTES ON THE READINGS

Isaiah 11: 1-10

This messianic prophecy promises that a shoot will come from the stump of Jesse, and a branch will blossom from its roots. The stump results from Yahweh's act of judgment as woodsman in Isa 10:33-34 although it is unclear whether Israel and its kings have therefore been axed by the Assyrian or Babylonian invasions of the 8th to 6th centuries, or whether the stump results from Yahweh's own issuing of a threat against all that was proud in the land. In any case, Nathan's promise to David is still alive in Isaiah's opinion (2 Samuel 7//1 Chronicles 17), and a new king, or even a new David, is expected to appear soon. This king will have a seven-fold gift of the spirit--the spirit of Yahweh, of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh. These gifts of the spirit will lead the king to just judicial decisions (wisdom and understanding, like Solomon), to effective military leadership (counsel and might are synonyms for military strategy), or to exemplary piety (acknowledgment of and reverence for Yahweh). Only Saul and David of Israel's kings had charismatic endowment (1 Sam 10:10-11; 16:13; 2 Sam 23:2). Solomon and his descendants profited by dynastic inertia--Solomon and all his successors became king because their father was king before them. This future and ideal king will be a righteous administrator of justice, as was expected of all Israelite kings (Ps 72:12-14) and of all royalty in the Ancient Near East in general. He will not be influenced by bribes or by those of wealth or high station (v 3); he will have a preferential option for the poor (v 4a); and he will announce harsh verdicts on the arrogant wicked (v 4b). Another paragraph (11:6-9) announces the paradisaical conditions that will prevail during/because of the reign of this new king. Wild and domestic animals will become strange bedfellows and dinner companions--wolves with lambs, panthers with young goats, and cows and lions, with a young child tending this mongrel herd. Cow and bear will eat from the same pasture, and the carnivorous lion will become vegetarian. Human infants will play with horned vipers; yes, nursing babies will put their hand into the lairs of vipers with no harm resulting. The earth will be transformed into the Garden of Eden, that is, conditions of the end time will return to the conditions enjoyed by our first parents. The last verse in this paragraph attributes this transformation from a violent to a non-violent world to the universal acknowledgment of Yahweh's sovereignty, a picture not unlike Isaiah 2 and Micah 4.

Romans 15: 4-13

Romans is the first epistle in the New Testament, although not the first to be written. Paul wrote it to the church at Rome, which included both Jews and Gentiles. His primary theme is the basics of the good news of Christ, salvation for all people. The book was probably written in 57 AD, when Paul was near the end of his third missionary journey around the Eastern Mediterranean. It is unusual in that it was written to a church that Paul had not visited.

Today's passage, arguably the climax of Paul's letter, begins and ends with hope, and it gives the character of God as the basis for that hope. In v. 4, "steadfastness

and the encouragement of the scriptures" is the source of hope. In v. 5, "the God of steadfastness and encouragement," to whom scripture witnesses, gives hope. In v. 12 the Gentiles hope in the Messiah from the line of David, and in v. 13, the final and familiar blessing sums up the passage, and indeed, the letter as a whole: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." In fact, hope threads throughout the letter to the Romans: Abraham, the model of faith, "hopes against hope" that God will make good on the promise of an heir, despite Sarah's barrenness and both her and Abraham's advanced age (4:18). Through Jesus Christ we also "rejoice in hope of sharing the glory of God;" indeed, present suffering, far from dashing our hopes, disciplines us in patient endurance, building a character capable of hope (5:2-5). Again, in Romans 8:18-25, the present is a time of suffering, but we live in confident hope of the redemption of our body, the liberation of all creation from futility, decay and death. This hope, says Paul, is for something that cannot be seen at present, "for who hopes for what they see? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." So by the time we get to the grand finale of Romans in today's lesson, we have learned that hope and steadfastness go together, and that God is the source of both. We learn also that Paul finds reason for hope in the way he sees God working through his own ministry, by bringing Gentiles to faith in Christ the Messiah of Israel. Such Gentile worship of God shows that God is keeping the promises made in scripture.

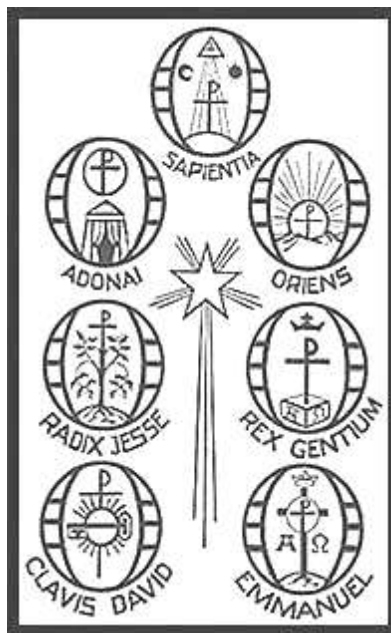
Matthew 3: 1-12

This gospel is the first in the New Testament, but it was probably the second to be written. Scholars recognize that it borrows material from Mark, and from a sayings source containing sayings of Jesus and known as Q (for *Quelle*, German for source). The author shows an understanding of Jewish culture and religion not found in the other gospels. It was probably written about 60 to 70 AD, possibly for a largely Jewish audience.

At the heart of the lesson from Matthew for Advent 2, and perhaps its overall theme, is the matter of hope. As usual, on this traditional John the Baptist Sunday, John appears as the one who prepares the way with talk of the nearness of the kingdom and a call for repentance (3:2). There is one who is coming, he says, and this expectancy shapes the narrative. In the same way it addresses our own expectations as it questions what dreams shape our images of the future, or even whether we imagine a future at all. Is there any hope left in us? If the overall theme is one of hope, that theme is focused in two major sections of the lesson. The first part (1-6) is captured in the summary of John's preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." The second part, beginning with "But when he saw," (7) might be characterized under the themes of righteousness or judgment. Repentance means to assume responsibility for the future and not to be tied to the past and to personal prerogatives. "Do not presume" upon your status as children of Abraham, John says. God is able to raise up new children (9). The key focus is on God's ability and the promise of God's power. Repentance and judgment are serious business, but one does not force fruit. Fruit springs forth out of a new orientation, out of knowing one's place as a child of God's promise. In baptism's call to such response as God's children, we experience the transforming power that

links "being" (children of God) and "doing" (bearing fruit), between "faith" and "action." Matthew will hold this wholeness before us throughout the gospel. "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world" (5:13-14). "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them." (7:24).

Hope for such wholeness is finally secured in the promise of the one who is coming. When John claims that God is able to raise up children, this is clearly a promissory announcement of the power of God that will indeed "raise up" a child whose resurrection will be life and salvation for us.



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