

The Third Sunday of Epiphany 2023

Please read the details of Christ Church's current Coronavirus advice at the end of this sheet.

The Collect:

Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Old Testament lesson is written in the Book of the prophet Isaiah:

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

The word of the Lord

(Isaiah 9.1–4)

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. Matthew:

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.' From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

The Gospel of the Lord

(Matthew 4.12–23)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord.

In last week's gospel reading, from St. John, we heard Jesus ask the question, "What are you looking for?" (Jn 1.38) And, as we explored last Sunday, this is the question Jesus continues to ask of us today: what are we looking for, listening to, hoping for? What is it that we most value in our lives in the here and now? When Jesus calls the fishermen by the Sea of Galilee, Matthew records that in Peter and Andrew's case, they "Immediately... left their nets and followed him...". Similarly, we are told that James and John also,

“Immediately... left the boat and their father and followed him.” With no questions asked, these men just left - James and John didn’t even stop to help their father bring in the boat. This sudden response seems startling. To leave your occupation, family and all that was familiar too you for a while is one thing, but to just up and drop everything for a future unknown in the company of a relative stranger seems astonishing. We know, from St John’s Gospel that these men had previously heard of Jesus reputation and subsequently met him. As it is recorded; Andrew, *“found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah”. He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (Peter).* It is also true that It would have been seen as a great honour to be chosen by a rabbi. When a rabbi accepted a student, it was on the understanding that the rabbi felt the student had the ability and commitment to not just learn from him, but to become like him. It is also true that these disciples followed Jesus because they thought he was might well be the promised Messiah. But why did they believe that he was the Messiah among many who would have been claiming that title? In Luke’s gospel we hear a key detail which Matthew does not record, Jesus says to Simon-Peter, *“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So, they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”* (Lk 5:2-11) This miraculous element would surely have been a key aspect of their decision to follow him and to *abide* with him. It seems the question, *“what are you looking for?”* is answered most plainly for the disciples *in* Jesus. That question of Jesus’ *“what are you looking for”* and his invite to abide with him, asks us to take a serious look at ourselves. It urges us to consider our past, to be honest about our current situation and, chiefly, to contemplate our future - especially in terms of our spiritual priorities. In this Sunday’s gospel, Matthew records how Jesus gives us the tools to address our past, our present, and our future. He shows what we are to look for, listen to, and value. When it comes to assessing our past, Jesus is clear, he picks up on John the Baptist’s message saying, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”* The call to repent is not a command but rather an invitation, but Jesus’ message is nonetheless unflinching; all of us have made mistakes, fallen short, not lived up to what God knows we can be; all have ‘sinned’. This does not imply that all are especially wicked, but it acknowledges that we all make choices, and often we make poor ones, and sometimes knowingly so. Jesus also shows us the way forward, he says *“repent”*, turn yourself around, get up and start again and listen for God’s voice in your lives to guide you. If repentance is the key to dealing with our past relationship with God, then Jesus’ assurance, that *“the kingdom of heaven has come near”* hints at our present situation with God too. Jesus lived among us, not just to tell us about a future heavenly paradise, but rather to proclaim that God’s mercy and love are already present in the here and now. We are to look for signs of the kingdom, here and now, look for them and work to make them grow and grow. This doesn’t mean we are to be unrealistic about the painful realities of the world, with its selfishness, hunger, war, and waste. Instead, we are called to place our hope and trust in God through Christ, that through him and in him, all things can and will be well. The role of Jesus’ followers in that ‘making all things well’ is clear from Matthew’s account; Jesus says to his soon-to-be disciples, *“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”* And that brings us to the future, we like those disciples, are called, individually and collectively, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to build up his body around and among us. We too are called to be fishers of people, just as the first disciples were and just like them Jesus call to us means he must trust us to be capable of growing ever more into his likeness. If you think that sounds like it might need a miracle, then remember Peters’ amazing catch of fish. If that still leaves you wondering then remember Jesus’ words, *“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...”* With that assurance, what are we waiting for? May God bless you all. **Amen.**

Additional prayer:

Eternal Lord, our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation
to your glory, hidden through past ages
and made known in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A blessing for the Epiphany season:

Christ our Lord, to whom kings bowed down in worship and offered gifts,
reveal to you his glory and pour upon you the riches of his grace.
And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Please pray for peace and especially for the people of Ukraine.

Wishing you all every blessing - Fr. Peter

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT DUE TO THE RECENT SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN ENERGY COSTS THE CHURCH WILL NOT BE HEATED AS OFTEN AS IN PREVIOUS YEARS. WE ARE EXPLORING WAYS TO IMPROVE ENERGY USAGE OR SWITCH TO ALTERNATES BUT FOR THE TIME BEING PLEASE DRESS APPROPRIATELY DURING THE COLD WINTER MONTHS.

THERE IS A 'FOOD BANK' BOX OF VARIOUS FOODSTUFFS; TINS, CEREALS, BISCUITS, JUICES ETC IN THE CHURCH PORCH. ANYONE WHO FINDS THEMSELVES IN NEED DURING THESE DIFFICULT TIMES IS WELCOME TO TAKE SOME ITEMS TO HELP OUT WITH THE WEEKLY SHOPPING. IF YOU ARE ABLE, WE ALSO NEED REGULAR DONATIONS FOR THE BOX TO KEEP THIS SERVICE GOING. ALL DONATIONS ARE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED. MANY THANKS – FR. PETER.

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT CORONAVIRUS IS STILL CIRCULATING IN THE POPULATION. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO WEAR A FACEMASK WHEN MIXING CLOSELY INSIDE THE CHURCH.

IF YOU, OR ANYONE YOU HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH HAS TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID 19, OR IF YOU HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 YOURSELF – PLEASE DO NOT ATTEND CHURCH.

**OUR SUNDAY EUCHARIST IS AT 10AM EACH WEEK AND EVENSONG IS AT 6PM SUNDAY.
PLEASE SEE NEWSHEET FOR DATES**

(THERE IS CURRENTLY NO SUNDAY 8AM OR TUESDAY 10AM SERVICE)

UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE COMMUNION WILL CONTINUE TO BE UNDER ONE KIND ONLY (CONSECRATED BREAD) AS PERMITTED UNDER CHURCH OF ENGLAND RULINGS. THIS POLICY IS UNDER REVIEW BY THE CLERGY AND PCC PLEASE READ COMING NEWSHEETS FOR CHANGES.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES REGARDING THIS, PLEASE EMAIL FR. PETER:

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