

Representatives of the Pharisees (who enforced traditional Jewish law and practice) ask in v. 25: why are you performing an official rite without official status? (Jews baptized proselytes at the time.) John tells them that the one to whom he points is already on earth (v. 26); he is so great that I am not even worthy to be his slave. Surprisingly, per v. 28, this occurred outside Israel. © 1996-2020 Chris Haslam

~ Notices ~

Christmas - Regrettably, the continuing Covid restrictions mean that Christmas will be more subdued this year, with no congregational singing and some of our traditional events such as the St Columba's Christmas Tree festival and Kilfenora Cathedral Christingle service cancelled. However, the following services at Christmas will take place:

Christmas Eve - Kilnasoolagh - 8.00pm Communion

Christmas Day - Spanish Point - 9.30am Communion
- St Columba's - 11.30am Communion

Also note that '**Christmas Miscellany**' - an ecumenical service between the Anglican Diocese of Limerick and Killaloe and the Catholic Diocese of Killaloe will be recorded largely at St Columba's Ennis and broadcast on YouTube and parish/diocesan websites at 7.00pm on Sunday the 20th December - a link will be on our website and YouTube channel and will be our online service for that Sunday.

Prayers - Prayers are said daily for the welfare of our community, our nation and the world. If you have any particular issue that you would like to be prayed for, do please email me on frkevinobrien@me.com or call me on 065 672 4721.

YouTube - our YouTube channel now has over 120 videos, comprising services, talks and sermons. Please do visit the channel by searching for **St Columba's Church Ennis** and do *subscribe* if you can, we are aiming to reach 100 subscribers before Christmas. Also visit our **Facebook** page: **Drumcliffe Church of Ireland Ennis**

Rector: Email: frkevinobrien@me.com Tel: 065 672 4721

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- Mission Charities -

The two charities being supported this year are:

Womens Aid **Jigsaw**
www.womensaid.ie www.jigsaw.ie

See the diocesan website for the Bishop's address:
<http://www.limerick.anglican.org>

- Advent Wreath Prayer -

God our Father,
you gave to Zechariah and Elisabeth
in their old age
a son called John.

He grew up strong in spirit,
prepared the people for the coming of the Lord,
and baptized them in the Jordan to wash away their sins:

Help us, who have been baptized into Christ,
to be ready to welcome him into our hearts,
and to grow strong in faith by the power of the Spirit.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the Light who is coming into the world.

~



**3rd Sunday
of Advent
(Year A)**

Collect

God for whom we watch and wait,
you sent John the Baptist to
prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak
the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause
of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Suggested Hymns - *For the online service you might like to view these hymns with lyrics on YouTube.*

- 1) Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4aH7oMJRcc>
- 2) The Angel Gabriel from Heaven came.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKnvpPuT4jI>
- 3) O thou, who camest from above
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3UYybc7Xa0>
- 4) Come thou long expected Jesus
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEEd0uWnDGs>

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11

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

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. 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. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

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.

Commentary

Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11

This passage was probably written after the people of Israel returned from Exile. It foretells the total salvation of God's people: bodily, spiritually, individually and socially. The prophet says that God has empowered him to act on God's behalf; God has "anointed" him, commissioned him to preach and to hear the Word of faith, to understand God's word, and to be strengthened in following it. (Vv. 1b-2 are Jesus' text when he preaches the good news in the synagogue in Nazareth: see Luke 4:18-19.) This is a message of rescue for God's people, in all ways. "The year of the Lord's favour" (v. 2) is mentioned in Leviticus 25:10: in a jubilee year, a year dedicated to God, one of liberty, all shall return home to their families. It is a year of rest in which the land produces without being sown. (The word translated as "vengeance" can be rendered as rescue.) In 60:21, God promises the people righteousness, oneness with God. Calling them "oaks of righteousness" here (v. 3) indicates the strength of their bond with him. They will show God's majesty and power ("glory"), as intermediaries ("priests", v. 6) between him and other nations. Vv. 4-7 tell us that strangers, foreigners, from all nations will contribute to the restoration of righteousness on earth. They will be greatly ("double") blessed, and have eternal joy. The promises to Abraham made in Haran are finally to be fulfilled (v. 9). "They" (probably Israel, but possibly the foreigners too) will be rewarded ("recompense", v. 8); God's agreement with them will last for ever. In vv. 10-

11, the prophet speaks as the renewed Jerusalem. All will rejoice because God has provided salvation and has healed their rift with God. Just as seeds grow into plants that can be seen, so God will cause people to be joined with him, to grow in him, and to praise him as an example for "all the nations".

Luke 1:47-55

This poem is known as the Magnificat, from the first word of the Latin translation. Mary is visiting Elizabeth and Zechariah. God's messenger, Gabriel, has told her that she will bear Jesus, "Son of God" (v. 35), successor to David and founder of an eternal kingdom. Now she thanks God. Speaking today, she might begin: I, from the depth of my heart, declare the Lord's greatness and rejoice in God my Saviour. In Vv. 48-50 she praises God and says how much she depends on God's mercy; vv. 51-53 speak of the great reversals God has, and will, achieve through all ages; vv. 54-55 recall that he has fulfilled, and continues to fulfill, his promises to the patriarchs. In choosing Mary, God goes against conventional wisdom: he chooses the poor and lowly over the "proud" (v. 51) and "powerful" (v. 52).

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Paul is drawing toward the conclusion of his letter. He has just exhorted the Thessalonian Christians regarding their personal conduct and their relations within the community. Now he turns to spiritual matters. God's plan for them, realized in Christ, is to "rejoice always", to make their lives a continual prayer, a working in unison with God, and to be thankful to God for his freely-given gifts, whatever may happen to them (vv. 16-18). Do not, he says in v. 19, suppress manifestations of the Holy Spirit as he works through members of the community; do not despise "the words of prophets" (v. 20), i.e. preaching inspired by God, words of consolation and warning spoken by members who receive messages from God, and predictions of future events, but be aware that there are true and false prophets; there are those who authentically speak God's word, but others who do not, who are false, "evil" (v. 22). Take care to discern, in the context of the community, all supposed manifestations of the Spirit ("test everything", v. 21). Finally, in vv. 23-24, Paul prays that God, who brings peace (shalom) in the community now and promises eternal peace in his kingdom, may bring them into union with him ("sanctify"). Also, may every aspect of each one of them – their relationship to God ("spirit"), their personal vitality ("soul"), and their physical bodies – be (and be ready to be) found godly, worthy of the kingdom, when Christ comes again. God, who calls them to the Christian way, in his fidelity will sanctify them and make them worthy of the kingdom.

John 1:6-8,19-28

In the opening verses of the book, the evangelist has told us, that the Word, the logos, (i.e. what God says, God in action, creating, revealing and redeeming) existed before all time. He is the force behind all that exists; he causes physical and spiritual life to be; life, goodness, light, overcomes all evil. Jesus, the "light" (v. 7), took on being human through God, and is a force for goodness, light, godliness, for all people. Now he tells of John the baptizer, who is sent, commissioned by God, to point to Jesus, to "testify to the light" (v. 7). He is the lamp that illuminates the way, but Christ is the light (v. 8). When the religious authorities ("Jews", v. 19) send emissaries ("priests and Levites") to assess the authenticity of this religious figure, John tells them that he is neither of those whom they are expecting to come to earth: neither "the Messiah" (v. 20) nor the returned "Elijah" (v. 21). (Jews believed that one or both would establish a kingdom on earth free from Roman domination.) Nor is he "the prophet" who was expected (by some) to be instrumental in establishing the Messiah's kingdom. John says simply that he is the one who prepares "the way of the Lord" (v. 23), who announces the Messiah's coming, fulfilling Isaiah 40:3.