

The Birth of St John the Baptist.

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

The saints were faithful unto death
and now dwell in the heavenly kingdom for ever.
As we celebrate their joy,
let us bring to the Lord our sins and weaknesses,
and ask for his mercy.

**God of mercy,
We acknowledge that we are all sinners.
We turn from the wrong that we have thought and said and done,
And are mindful of all that we have failed to do.
For the sake of Jesus, who died for us,
Forgive us for all that is past,
And help us to live each day
In the light of Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

May God our Father forgive us our sins,
And bring us to the fellowship of his table
With his saints for ever.
Amen.

Almighty God,
by whose providence your servant John the Baptist
was wonderfully born,
and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Saviour
by the preaching of repentance:
lead us to repent according to his preaching
and, after his example,
constantly to speak the truth, boldly to rebuke vice,
and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake;
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.

A reading from the Prophecy of Isaiah.

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.
A voice cries out:
'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'
A voice says, 'Cry out!'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;^[a]
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,^[b]
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'
See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,

and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

We've just heard words which marked a turning point in the life of people who were in exile, in captivity, defeated and far from home. Those words from the prophet Isaiah meant that it was time to look away from their suffering and look up and away to a new future, a release from captivity and a homecoming. These words heralded a new beginning which was described in building terms – building a new, straight road so that they could meet with God, so that God could rescue them. Interestingly, the new building was to start in the desert, the place where we might not expect anything good to happen. God cried out for his people to be comforted, and maybe we are crying out for comfort too. Maybe we feel like we're living in a sort of desert, far away from what we enjoy and what we think is normal. Remember that it was in the midst of suffering that God promised a fresh start. As we begin to look up and away from these months of lockdown, maybe it's time for us to watch out for signs of new hope and it's time for us to get ready for what God is doing.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Luke.
Glory to you, O Lord.

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

What's in a name? Do you know what your name means? Maybe we care more about what a name sounds like than what it means these days, but when Zechariah and Elizabeth's child was named, the meaning was all important and it sounds like the whole extended family had a say in what he was called. His mother Elizabeth spoke up against the family to make sure he was named John. This is the name he was given by angel Gabriel and it means God is gracious or God is merciful.

How was that grace and mercy lived out in John's life?

Well, the prophet Isaiah's words echo into the wilderness where John spent his formative years and began his public ministry. Again, the people were defeated and living under military occupation. Maybe they wondered where God was and what he was up to. It was in that time and place of difficulty that John prepared them for the new thing that God was doing and pointed the way to Jesus.

Maybe this is time for us to think about what God is doing.

Prayers of intercession.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

The Lord be with you

and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

We rejoice in the glorious splendour of your majesty
for you have given us a share with John the Baptist
in the inheritance of the saints in light.

In the darkness of this passing age
they proclaim the glory of your kingdom.

Chosen as lights in the world,

they surround our steps as we journey on
towards the city of eternal light

where they sing the everlasting song of triumph.

In communion with angels and archangels

and all who have served you on earth
and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voices to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and *saying*:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
[Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.]**

Accept our praises, heavenly Father,
through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and as we follow his example and obey his command,
grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit
these gifts of bread and wine
may be to us his body and his blood;
who, in the same night that he was betrayed,
took bread and gave you thanks;
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.

In the same way, after supper
he took the cup and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them, saying:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.

Therefore, 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 your kingdom,
and with this bread and this cup
we make the memorial of Christ your Son our Lord.
Great is 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 your divine majesty,
renew us by your Spirit,
inspire us with your love
and unite us in the body of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through him, and with him, and in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
with all who stand before you in earth and heaven,
we worship you, Father almighty,
in songs of everlasting praise:

**Blessing and honour and glory and power
be yours for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

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.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

God's holy gifts
for God's holy people.

**Jesus Christ is holy,
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Post Communion prayers.

Merciful Lord,
whose prophet John the Baptist
proclaimed your Son as the Lamb of God
who takes away the sin of the world:
grant that we who in this sacrament
have known your forgiveness and your life-giving love
may ever tell of your mercy and your peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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

The blessing.

God give you grace to follow his saints
in faith and hope and love;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with you now and always.
Amen.

Stay in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ, Amen.

Stay well, stay safe and God bless you.