

The Third Sunday of Advent

14th December 2025

Gaudete Sunday



Gaudete Sunday is a joyous celebration.

Although it takes place during the usually penitential period of Advent, Gaudete Sunday serves as a mid-point to rejoice in the nearness of Jesus's return. Gaudete (Rejoice!) is the first word in the traditional introit for this Sunday. (Philippians 4.4). Vestments can reflect this, changing from purple for penitential to rose to signify the shift in emphasis.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians)

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

HYMN

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 breast from sin;
Make straight the way for God within;
Prepare we in our hearts a home,
Where such a mighty Guest may come

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 and fall no more;
Once more upon Thy people shine,
And fill the world with love divine

To Him Who left the throne of Heaven
To save mankind, all praise be given;
Like praise be to the Father done,
And Holy Spirit, Three in One.

Introduction to confession

The axe is laid at the root of the trees;
every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down.'
But confident in God's mercy we confess our sins.

Turn to us again, O God our saviour,
and let your anger cease from us:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
Show us your compassion, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Your salvation is near for those that fear you,
that glory may dwell in our land:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the Father of all mercies
Cleanse us from our sins, +
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect of Third Sunday of Advent

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

The Advent Collect

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

The angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary
that she was to be the mother of your Son.
Though Mary was afraid,
she responded to your call with joy.
Help us, whom you call to serve you,
to share like her in your great work
of bringing to our world your love and healing.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the light who is coming into the world.
Amen.

First scripture Isaiah 35 1-10

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad
for them, And the desert shall rejoice and
blossom as the rose;

2 It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,
Even with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
The excellence of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
The excellency of our God.

3 Strengthen the weak hands,
And make firm the feeble knees.

4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Behold, your God will come with vengeance,
With the recompense of God;
He will come and save you."

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,
And streams in the desert.

7 The parched ground shall become a pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water;
In the habitation of jackals, where each lay,
There shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

8 A highway shall be there, and a road,
And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.
The unclean shall not pass over it,
But it shall be for others.

Whoever walks the road, although a fool,
Shall not go astray.

9 No lion shall be there,
Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it;
It shall not be found there.



But the redeemed shall walk there,
10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

The Gospel Canticle
Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

1 My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
2 From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.
3 He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
4 He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
5 Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.
6 He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
7 He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,
8 The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever. Luke 1.46-55

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

HYMN

The Church of God a kingdom is,
where Christ in power doth reign,
where spirits yearn till seen in bliss
their Lord shall come again.

There rich and poor, from countless lands,
praise Christ on mystic rood;
there nations reach forth holy hands
to take God's holy food.

Glad companies of saints possess
this Church below, above;
and God's perpetual calm doth bless
their paradise of love.

There pure life-giving streams overflow
the sower's garden ground;
and faith and hope fair blossoms show,
and fruits of love abound.

An altar stands within the shrine
whereon, once sacrificed,
is set, immaculate, divine,
the Lamb of God, the Christ.

O King, O Christ, this endless grace
to us and all men bring,
to see the vision of thy face
in joy, O Christ, our King.

Gospel Acclamation

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

The Gospel

The Holy Gospel is written in the 11th Chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew beginning at the 2nd verse.

Glory be to thee O Lord

2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

This is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to thee, O Christ

Reflection

When John the Baptist burst onto the scene it was extraordinary moment. For 400 hundred years there had been no prophetic voice. No one had arisen to say to the people of Israel ‘thus says the Lord’. John breaks this silence. His message is “get ready – the time is now.”

Jesus speaking of John says “No one in history surpasses John, John is the ‘Elijah’ the messenger, you’ve all been expecting to arrive and introduce the Messiah”

Why was John the Baptist so special? He is the last of the prophets. Their message was precious, full of promise but partial, incomplete, they all pointed forward to culminate in John who stands as a focus point, a pivot between the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) and the Gospels and writings of the church (New Testament).

He announces and prepares the way for the Messiah or the Christ, these words mean the same and both mean the Anointed One, a man anointed by God with power and purpose. To the Jewish mind this One would restore Israel to its former glory.

We understand this Anointed One to be Jesus. When Jesus came into the world, he brought something which was totally and absolutely new. He brought full revelation of the love God has for our world. He marked a new era in religious history and human civilisation. More than that, in his person and actions he gave a new understanding of God which he calls the Kingdom of Heaven/God.

In this week’s gospel reading John is in prison for fearlessly publicly condemning the ruler Herod for his marriage to his half-brother’s wife. Herod had seduced her during a visit to his brother and married her after dismissing his wife.

In prison John is visited by his disciples who tell him what Jesus is doing. John sends his disciples off with a question for Jesus. “Are you the expected Anointed One or must we keep waiting for another.”

Why would he ask such a question? Are we to believe that this fearless prophet had sunk into despair and doubt? Had the confines and darkness of his cell so affected his mind which was used to the desert and the open sky that he no longer believed what he previously had boldly proclaimed? Jesus and he were cousins, it is impossible to believe they did not know each other’s history. Both children born of promise and prophecy.

So, it seems hard to believe. Here are three possible explanations:

Some people think the question was asked not for John’s sake but for the sake of his disciples. It may be that they were questioning John. Had he been right when he had pointed them to Jesus?

John had baptised Jesus and recognised then that Jesus was not as other men. “This is the one who will baptise, immerse, with the holy spirit; I am not worthy to serve him, to untie his shoe! He is the Lamb of God who will take away sin of the world.” John was so convinced of this fact that he let some of his own disciples leave him to join with Jesus at that time.

But now the others want reassurance that John was right. And John's answer to them is. "If you have any doubts, if you are not sure, go and see what it is he is doing and what he can do and then your doubts will be at an end." A good answer.

If anyone begins to argue with us about Jesus and to question his supremacy, the best of all answers is not to try and counter argument but say "Give your life to him and see what he can do with it." The supreme argument for Christ is not intellectual debate, but experience of his changing power.

It maybe that John's question reflected his impatience; he was a passionate, outspoken man. Perhaps he was thinking, when is Jesus going to act? Perhaps Jesus was not doing what he expected him to do? Those who look and wait for the 'savage wrath of God against evil', will always be disappointed in Jesus. But those who look for love and forgiveness will never find their hopes defeated.

Some people think that this question reflects a growing clarity of faith in John. In the darkness of his cell, he found himself enlightened. As he thought about what happened at the baptism, and what he is now hearing there is a growing certainty that Jesus is indeed the promised one. John knows that his time is short. What he asks for is nothing but confirmation of his hopes.

And then comes Jesus' answer. "Go back and don't tell John what I am saying but what I am doing. Don't tell John what I am claiming tell him what is happening.'

Have you noticed that when someone tells you about their experience of Jesus Christ, they don't tell you what he taught, but what he has done for them? I met a woman weekend who had been an alcoholic for thirty years and was now free and remaking her life because of Jesus.

The things that Jesus did when on this earth, he still does. Hear again the prophetic words of Isaiah:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
Then shall the lame leap like a deer
And walk upon a highway called the Holy Way;
and the traveller, though foolish shall not go astray
Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!

Something happens to us when we place our belief and trust in Jesus. When we ask him into our lives and receive from him forgiveness and new life.

We who were blind to the truth about ourselves, about others and about God have our eyes opened. We who were deaf to the voice of conscience and of God begin to listen.

We who are imprisoned by our past or by addiction or crippled by grief, or remorse, find release and healing. We who are world-weary and full of fear begin to find strength and courage to face and deal with life because we know that we are not alone; One walks with us always.

But why does Jesus say that in the kingdom he speaks of John as the lowliest person is ahead of him.

John did not live to see the cross. He did not see the full revelation of the love of God. Jesus' death and resurrection opens the door for all humankind; this is the greatest revelation of God.

John preached a gospel of divine holiness with divine destruction. Jesus preached the gospel of divine holiness with divine love. He demonstrated this by his life but supremely by his death.

It takes the cross of Jesus to show us the breadth, depth and height of the love of God. Jesus gave his life for us and allowed us to do our very worst, to throw all our darkness at this blazing light because we cannot bear it. To destroy it, to put it to death.

And yet in the cold darkness of an early morning the light returns to us in the resurrection. Still loving us, still desiring us, now offering us new life.

As we draw near to Christmas we approach a mystery, a mystery that changed, and is still changing our world. We focus on a baby the embodiment of vulnerability, but we must not let sentiment and story cloud our vision. The child that is given to us is God come to us.

Come to us to tell us that all creation is known and loved. That your life and mine has meaning a purpose and we are greatly loved. To draw us back to himself with restoring and healing purpose so that we will live this life more abundantly begin our journey now into the resurrection.

How will we receive him?

Intercessions

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid
we pray to Jesus.
Come to your Church as Lord and judge.

Lord prepare us for your coming - in the church.
Give us a new vision and a new hope.
Open your church to the free flow of your refreshing Spirit.
We hold in your love our local churches and the church throughout the world.

Lord prepare us for your coming - in the world.
Drive away despair from our politics; revive our dreams of justice;
restore our passion for what is good, right and true.
We hold in your love our King and pray for our Government and the leaders of nations;
strengthen what is good and restrain what is evil.

Lord prepare us for your coming – in our lives.
Remind us of the power of love to heal relationships, within our families.
May love motivate our care for our neighbours and inspire us to do more than just enough.
We hold in your love those close to us for whom we have especial concern.

Lord prepare us for your coming – in those in need.
In places where warfare, fear and violence make a normal life impossible,
where peace seems far away.
We hold in your love those who have so little and fight just to survive.
Remind us to be thankful for our abundance.

Lord prepare us for your coming – in our care for each other.
For those who are ill or injured and for those who watch and wait.
We hold in your love those who live with disability;
those depressed and anxious, the lonely; all living in fear and under stress;
the unemployed and the rejected; those who are displaced, the homeless, those in prison.

Lord prepare us for your coming - in the resurrection hope you bring.
We thank you for those who have died who are dear to us. We are grateful for their lives, for how they enriched ours.
We hold in your love those who have died recently and for those who mourn them.

Come Lord, draw near and rejuvenate our faith, strengthen us for action, open our eyes to the wonder of your loving presence amongst us. We commit ourselves each other and all whom we love to your mercy and protection.

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;
give new courage to your people,
who trust in your love.

By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of your kingdom
on earth as in heaven,
where you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.

Amen

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Amen.

May God himself, the God of peace,
make you perfect and holy,
and keep you safe and blameless, in spirit, soul and body,
for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

HYMN

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom
bring.

By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.