

United Parish@Home

Sunday Services



December 2025 and January 2026

**The United Parish of Chinnor, Sydenham,
Aston Rowant and Crowell**

The ministry team offer you these services, particularly if you find you are unable to attend church.

Our prayer is that these services will help you still feel connected to, and loved by, your church family.

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Sunday 7th December
2nd Sunday of Advent

(You may wish to light a candle during this service to mark the 2nd Sunday of Advent).

Opening prayer

God is with us as we pause to worship, ever present and everywhere. Let us set this time apart to make God the focus of our thoughts and worship. Blessed be God's glorious name; may God's glory fill the earth. May the earth be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Amen

Psalm 72 vs 1-7

Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones
with justice.
May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of the righteousness.
May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.
May he endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

Prayer of confession

Father God, we have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and humbly repent for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ. Have mercy on us; that we might delight in your will and walk your ways to the glory of your name. Amen

Light a candle

I light this candle to affirm my faith in Christ, may his light shine brightly in our sin darkened world, and bring hope, healing and joy this Advent and always. Amen

Collect: Second Sunday of Advent

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power
and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen

Bible Reading: Matthew 3 vs 1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

*'A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
"Prepare the way of the lord,
Make straight paths for him."*

John's clothes were made from camels' hair, and he had a leather belt round his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of Jordan.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and the Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: 'you brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

Produce fruit in keeping repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children of Abraham. The axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

'I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

Reflection *(by Margaret)*

John the Baptised emphasised the need for weeding out: 'Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown onto the fire.

His words seem harsh and uncompromising, possibly because he found himself confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees at the Jordan. Like Jesus, John was far gentler and more sensitive with ordinary folk who came looking for repentance and healing.

In our own attempts at repentance, we need to be both ruthless and gentle. Ruthless because sin strangles and destroys our relationship with God and the world, rather like bindweed throttles our garden plants.

Our weaknesses need to be determinedly and consistently addressed, otherwise the new, fresh growth of love for God will be suffocated by their clinging threads.

But in the same way that getting rid of the bindweed in our gardens is difficult, so we can never totally root out our sins alone. This is why we need to constantly call upon God for help.

We also need to remember to be gentle with ourselves, because we all fail at points in our lives, which is why Jesus persistently calls us to him to give us strength. Like creating and maintaining a beautiful garden, repentance is a lifelong process.

John the Baptist said: 'Produce fruit in keeping repentance.' The fruit from each of us will be different, according to the gifts God has given us, but we all share similarities.

First, we need to look at our lives and to understand where we have not been our best selves. Walking through our garden with our head in the air admiring the beautiful flowers will not reveal the bindweed at our feet. So, we must kneel to get a closer look.

Gently, we need to examine our lives and ourselves with honesty. We need to foster the desire for repentance and a steadfast spirit to change our ways, gradually, over years as we mature mentally and spiritually.

Like looking after our gardens and tending all the plants, we need to be getting on our knees regularly. Prayer is like weeding; it needs to be constant, and attentive to detail. For true and sincere repentance, we need to always be directing our lives towards God who gives us the help we need. We can bear all and tell all, sharing every detail of our lives, accepting God's attentiveness and compassion, further developing that deep belief that God is always there. We can pray to God anywhere and at any time. Take time to relax in prayer.

Draw close to God and relax in his presence.

When we do this God will take care of the half-destroyed bindweed at our feet.

The saying goes: 'There is no time like the present!' So we can begin today to acknowledge the bindweed of weakness and failure and begin to root it out the best we can. Take time this Advent to sit quietly and calmly with God. Let loves healing sunshine restore us and deal with the things that trouble us and that we find hard to handle.

Now is the time for repentance- but now is also the time for love.

Prayer

As we prepare ourselves for the time when Christ comes again in glory,

we pray for grace and honesty to what needs to be transforming in our

lives as individuals and as members of the church of God.

We pray for the church at this busy time of year. May all church leaders, pastors' teachers be directed, inspired and upheld by the living Spirit of God, and may there be a deepening of love and commitment in all Christians the world over.

May leaders of this nation and all nations around our wounded and broken world, be drawn increasingly to understand God's ways of justice and righteousness and be filled with longing to do what is right, honest and good.

May all families on earth be blessed with mutual love and caring consideration for one another. Where there are families that face tensions and disagreements at this time, may difficult relationships be refreshed and healed.

May those whom the days and nights creep past in pain and sorrow, be given comfort and hope; may the frightened find reassurance and the anxious peace of mind.

May all whom we have loved and lost and no longer see, know the eternal
peace and joy of heaven.

May we all be given a new enthusiasm for walking God's way,
clothed in the amour and light.

Awaiting his coming in glory let us pray

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 today 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

Hymn: Come thou long expected Jesus

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.

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

Born thy people to deliver;
born a child and yet a king;
born to reign in us for ever;
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thy own eternal Spirit,
rule in all our hearts alone:
by thy all-sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Final Prayer and Blessing

Lord, lead us and help us to follow you.

Lord, lead us and help us to keep our eyes on you.

Lord be at the centre of our lives, our thinking and our actions.

Make us useful in your service,

and show us how we can live so that our lives point towards Jesus.

Amen

Rejoicing that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are with us wherever we are. Amen

Sunday 14th December 2025
3rd Sunday Advent.

Malachi Chapter 3 vs 1

“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me”.

A Gathering Prayer

Lord Jesus, we pray that you would come to us by your Spirit
and fill us with your joy.

Take away our fear, lift up our hearts

And grant us a fresh vision of your glory.

Come, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Isaiah 35 vs 1-10

Isaiah promises the exiles that they will have a joyful return to their
homeland. The road will be so good that no one will get lost on it.

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad the desert shall
rejoice and blossom;

like the crocus it will blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and
singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and
Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees,

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, don't fear! Here is
your God.

He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf
unstopped;

then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the speechless
sing for joy.

For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water,
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
A highway shall be there and it shall be called the Holy Way.
The unclean shall travel on it, but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools shall go astray.
No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it,
they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness
sorrow and sighing shall flee away".

The Gospel – St. Matthew 11 vs 2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me". As they went their way, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John "What did you go into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
Who shall prepare your way before you.
Truly I tell you, among those born of women, no one has arisen
greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven
is greater than he”.

A Reflection *(by Joan)*

John the Baptist appeared on the scene when the nation of Israel was chafing under the rule of Rome. The people were longing for the coming of God’s Kingdom and many were excited at John’s call to repentance and to be baptised, believing God was about to fulfil the promises made to earlier prophets, of a great outpouring of God’s Spirit which would enable them to walk in obedience to God’s will.

In our Gospel passage we learn that John had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas. From prison John began to question whether Jesus was the one who was to bring the kingdom in power. Jesus was healing the sick and preaching that they should love their neighbour and even their enemies and there was an increasing hostility towards Jesus from the religious authorities. This was not what John was expecting. The world remained the same and there was no sign of God’s judgement so he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the one who was to come (the Messiah) or should they look for another?

Jesus answers they should tell John what he is doing, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. The days of the messianic fulfilment had arrived. The ministry of the prophets had reached their climax in the ministry of John. The old era had come to an end and the new was about to dawn. John was the prophet who was clearing the way for the Messiah.

Advent is the time when we discover God’s presence in the darkness, in the violence and pain of our world.

As we learn to live out the love and justice of God, as shown in Jesus, so God's kingdom comes. John prepares the way, showing our need to repent then Jesus steps in, with love and forgiveness.

An Advent Prayer.

Jesus, we are waiting for you to come – into our hearts, our homes
and our world
to fill them with your light and peace.

We are waiting for you to bring health to our sick ones
to make asylum seekers welcome
to comfort those who have lost loved ones
and to turn us around
so that we can be your hands and feet, your ears and eyes
in this world that needs you so much.

We wait with our fears, our anxieties and frustrations,
our pains and regrets, our shame and confusion
God, help us to wait in faith.

God of the future
we wait in hope for your coming
anticipating an unknown future
not sure of the form it will take.
We wait in joy for your coming
expectant with promises of freedom
eager for new possibilities
delighting in the gift of both,
God of waiting - wait with us. Amen.

A Blessing

May God give us light to guide us, courage to support us and love
to unite us, now and evermore. Amen.

Sunday 21st December 2025
Advent 4

Introduction

Today, on this fourth Sunday in Advent, our focus is on Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. Our gospel reading tells the account of a visit to Joseph by an angel who effectively asks Joseph if he will accept the role of being Jesus' father.

Collect

God our redeemer, who prepared Joseph to be the earthly father of your son, grant that, as he looked for his son coming as our saviour, we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Psalm: 113. One can imagine Joseph saying this as a prayer after he woke up from the dream with the angel.

¹Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, you his servants; praise the name of the LORD.

²Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore.

³From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised.

⁴The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,

⁶who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?

⁷He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

⁸he seats them with princes, with the princes of his people.

⁹ He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.

Gospel reading Matthew 1 vs 18 - end.

(Joseph accepts Jesus as His Son)

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:

²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Reflection *(by Brian)*

There are times when it is as if the whole world waits on the reaction of one single person. Today's gospel describes one such moment. Mary is betrothed to Joseph. They were most likely to have been promised to each other since Mary was a child.

Betrothal is usually for a year and it is when the couple agree to the promises made for them. At this stage they are known as man and wife and the relationship is binding. It can only be terminated by divorce.

Mary has told Joseph she is pregnant and he knows it is not his child. How could he understand when Mary tells him about her encounter with an angel? Joseph's reaction is a natural one. He cares for Mary, he does not want her to face public disgrace, but feels he must dismiss her. These thoughts disturbed him day and night. He had made up his mind, he knew what he must do. Then Joseph had a dream that would change the course of the world. An angel came and asks him to change his mind, telling him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Without Joseph's willingness, the whole plan of the nativity could come to nothing.

Often God depends on us. Without our cooperation the Kingdom of God cannot come on earth. Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body."

Prayers

Following on from the above reflection, why not start your prayers by praying that the Church may follow Joseph's example and be the hands and feet of the Lord as we follow His prompting this Christmastide. You could then go onto pray for what is on your mind at the moment and pray for those you know who would value your prayers.

Amongst other things, why not pray for:

- Church leaders, elders, pastors, councils and congregations who seek to minister in the multitude of churches, chapels and fellowships across the world. Especially pray for our United Parish and for Jacky, our Rector, the ministry team and the PCC.
- your family and friends, for your neighbours, for local, national and international leaders and governments.
- shopkeepers, carers and wardens; for hospitals, doctors and nurses and others in the front line, the NHS.
- what you have seen on the news lately; the trouble spots of the world and those places and peoples in need.
- peace and justice to reign in those parts of the world where evil exists in terms of war, oppression and hate.
- those you know who would love you to pray for them at this time, for the lonely, the ill, the stressed, the bereaved.
- finally, pray for yourself and your situations.

Why not close your prayers by saying the Lords prayer.

Hymn

1 Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

2 Open now the crystal fountain
whence the living waters flow:
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

3 When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside:
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

Closing Prayer

Lord, I desire to grow spiritually and walk in the fullness of Your will. Help me not to be content with a shallow understanding of Your truth. Instead, give me the hunger to study Your Word, the wisdom to understand it, and the strength to apply it.

May this growth be evident in my speech, my thoughts, and my interactions with others. Let me bear the fruit of the Spirit and shine as a light in this dark world, just like your servant Joseph. Amen.

The Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Christmas Day 2025



*Hark, hark, the wise eternal word,
like a weak infant cries!
In form of servant is the Lord,
and God in cradle lies.*

(Thomas Pestel)

Opening Verse and Prayer

Exodus 15 vs 11

“Who among the gods is like you, Lord?
Who is like you—
majestic in holiness, awesome in glory,
working wonders?”

Lord Jesus Christ,
your birth at Bethlehem
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:
accept our heartfelt praise
as we worship you,
our Saviour and our eternal God.
Amen.

A Psalm set for Christmas Day: Psalm 98

Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.
His own right hand and his holy arm
have won for him the victory.
The Lord has made known his salvation;
his deliverance has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.
He has remembered his mercy and faithfulness
towards the house of Israel,
and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
Sound praises to the Lord, all the earth;
break into singing and make music.
Make music to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the voice of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
sound praises before the Lord, the King.
Let the sea thunder and all that fills it,
the world and all that dwell upon it.
Let the rivers clap their hands
and let the hills ring out together before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.
In righteousness shall he judge the world
and the peoples with equity.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Confession

God our Father,
you sent your Son full of grace and truth:
forgive our failure to receive him.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
Jesus our Saviour,
you were born in poverty and laid in a manger:
forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.

Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Spirit of Love,
your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call:
forgive the hardness of our hearts.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of all healing and forgiveness
draw us to himself
and cleanse us from all our sins,
that we may behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Gospel Reading Luke 2 vs 1-14 **The Birth of Jesus**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them,

and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

**'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'**

Reflection (*By Tony*)

"WONDER": *a feeling of amazement and admiration, caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar.* Oxford Dictionary

Today as we gaze at the Christ Child wrapped in bands of cloth, gently laid in a manger, we see God's 'Wonderful Plan' of salvation in action, which he had revealed and promised in the Old Testament. He invites us to be still for a moment and see this 'Small Wonder' before us.

Today as we join the Shepherds on the hillside, we hear God's 'Wonderful News' of how in the brokenness of our World, God Himself is incarnate in human form, Immanuel is with us. He encourages us to believe and trust like the Shepherds, and know he is revealing Himself to us today, right now, wherever we are.

Today as we look back and not only see His birth, but His life and death, and Resurrection, we marvel at God's 'Wonderful Work' then, and now. He poses us a question, "How will you work with me, to continue my work into the coming year?"

We may think we have little resources and physical limitations, but by His Spirit he can still use us – just think of elderly Simeon and Anna in The Temple – Luke 2 vs 25 – 38.

Today we can picture ourselves with Mary and Joseph and Jesus, as the Shepherds and The Wise Men both visit at different times – what ‘Wonderful Encounters’. And it is Wonderful as we meet Jesus now, as we read these words wherever we are. Jesus calls us to allow that spark of ‘Small Wonder’ into all of our life, to let it grow and flow through us in prayer and praise, through letters and emails, and through all our daily encounters.

A VERY WONDERFUL AND JOYFUL CHRISTMAS TO YOU – Tony

Collect

Lord Jesus Christ,
your birth at Bethlehem
draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth:
accept our heartfelt praise
as we worship you,
our Saviour and our eternal God. Amen

Intercessions

Let us pray to Jesus our Saviour.

Christ, born in a stable,
give courage to all who are homeless.

We remember in prayer all those across the World today without a proper place to call ‘Home’. We pray for the Charity ‘Crisis’ today, asking God to bless their work among the homeless in our country.

Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, for whom the angels sang,
give the song of the kingdom to all who weep.

We hold in our prayers all those who feel they have no hope in life; for those in pain and suffering ill-health; for those facing death; for those who are bereaved; and for those who Christmas is a trial and a time of darkness.

We ask 'Immanuel' to draw close to each and everyone of those we name.

Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds,
give peace on earth to all who are oppressed.

We pause to think of all those places where today there will be warfare and conflict, fear and anxiety for the future, asking God to manifest His Peace in their presence despite what is going on around them.

Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt,
give humility and wisdom to all who govern.

We hold in our prayers King Charles and all the Royal Family – may his Christmas message challenge and inspire, and may his government and opposition, strive to create a just and merciful society.

Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly manger,
give the glory of your resurrection to all who rest in you.

As we gaze afresh at the 'Small Wonder' in his stall, let us hold his life, his Crucifixion, and Resurrection in our minds, as we remember those who have died, and those who mourn.

Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Jesus, Saviour, child of Mary,
you know us and love us,
you share our lives
and hear our prayer.
Glory to you for ever. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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.

Carol:

- 1 We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

Refrain:

*O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

- 2 Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign. *[Refrain]*

- 3 Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, voices raising,
worshiping God on high. *[Refrain]*
- 4 Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb. *[Refrain]*
- 5 Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
sounds through the earth and skies. *[Refrain]*

Closing Prayer and Blessing

May Christ,
who by his incarnation gathered into one
things earthly and heavenly,
fill you with wonder, joy and peace.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. Amen

Sunday 28th December 2025

Christmas 1

A Simple Morning Prayer

May Christ, the true, the only light, banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.

Blessed are you, creator of all,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
As your dawn renews the face of the earth,
bringing light and life to all creation,
may we rejoice in this day you have made;
as we wake refreshed from the depths of sleep,
open our eyes to behold your presence
and strengthen our hands to do your will,
that the world may rejoice and give you praise.
Blessed be God for ever.

O Lord, open our lips:
And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Take time for silent prayer, or reflection, on the coming day.

Early in the morning my prayer comes before you.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**
You speak in my heart and say 'Seek my face';
your face, Lord, will I seek.
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy**

A PRAYER FOR THIS FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

God in Trinity, eternal unity of perfect love:

gather the nations to be one family,

and draw us into your holy life through the birth of Emmanuel,
our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

A READING FROM THE GOSPELS

Matthew 2 vs 13 - 23

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ 'A voice was heard in Ramah,

wailing and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children;

she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home

in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazarene.'

REFLECTION *(by Jacky)*

When we think of the famous dreamers of the Bible, it is probably Joseph (son of Jacob) that springs to mind, or maybe its Daniel. But actually, this Joseph (the husband of Mary) is recorded as having four dreams in the gospel of Matthew and so would be ranked second in the league of table of "who has had most angelic/prophetic dreams". (Daniel would be first).

It is in these dreams that the angel of God speaks to Joseph and gives him clear instructions about the next course of action to take. Actions that ensure that Mary, and the baby Jesus, are cared for and protected. Joseph is not on the edge of this story, and he is not an incidental to it. Joseph is one who listens, discerns and responds. The dreams that Joseph has are encounters with the messenger of God, that show him how to guard the fragile life that has been entrusted to him.

In today's scripture, Joseph is told clearly to take Mary and the child and flee to Egypt. Joseph does not argue or hesitate. He rises, gathers his family and obeys. In a narrative full of risk and violence, Joseph's obedience allows the story of Jesus to continue. The horrific murder of innocent children that Herod's rage inflicts on the children of Bethlehem gives the Gospel reading an urgency and sense of imminent danger. Joseph navigates this danger with the deep confidence that his dream has given him, and so the Holy Family immediately flee to Egypt.

Throughout scripture, dreams often mark the points in people's lives where God interrupts their human plans. Such dreams redirect lives and opens new possibilities. Joseph stands in that long tradition. Like Jacob at Bethel, like Solomon receiving wisdom, like Daniel hearing mysteries, Joseph discovers that God will speak in the quiet hours when the world has fallen still. His dreams do not confirm his own desires and plans. Remember he was ready to quietly dismiss Mary when it was revealed she was pregnant, until an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

For us, Joseph can be seen as a model of discernment. He listens in the quiet hours when the world has fallen still. He allows the word of God to shape his choices. And through his listening and discernment he has the confidence and trust in God to take costly actions. Is this something that we can learn from?

This passage invites us to take Joseph seriously. He is not a side issue. He shows us a pattern of faithful responsiveness. He teaches us to listen for God in the quiet moments, to allow the Spirit to guide our decisions and to act with courage when we are called to protect what is fragile and holy. Amen.

THE BENEDICTUS

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel :
for he has come to his people and set them free.
The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour :
born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets God promised of old to save us from our
enemies : from the hands of all who hate us.
To show mercy to our forebears :
and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham :
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship him without fear :
holy and righteous before him all the days of our life.
And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High :
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
To give his people knowledge of salvation :
by the forgiveness of their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God :
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death :
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

AN AFFIRMATION OF THE FAITH

I believe and trust in God the Father,
source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist.
I believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature, died for us and rose again.
I believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the
world. This is the faith of the Church. This is our faith. We believe and
trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

PRAYERS *may be offered for the day and its tasks, for the world and its needs
and for the Church and its life or this short litany may be used:*

Be exalted, Lord, above the heavens:
may your glory cover the earth.

Renew your Church in holiness:
and give your people the blessing of peace.

Keep our nation under your care:
and guide us in justice and truth.

Let your way be known on earth:
your saving power among all nations.

Do not let the needy, O God, be forgotten:
nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Lord, hear our prayer:
for we put our trust in you.

The prayers may conclude with the Lord's Prayer

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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.

O Lord and heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God,
we thank you for bringing us safely to the beginning of this new day:
defend us by your mighty power
that we may be kept free from all sin and safe from every danger;
and enable us in everything to do only what is right in your eyes;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE CONCLUSION

To the holy and glorious Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be blessing and honour, thanksgiving and praise,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty;
hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore, feed me now and evermore.

2 Open now the crystal fountain,
where the healing waters flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
ever be my strength and shield, ever be my strength and shield.

3 When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever sing to you, I will ever sing to you.

January 2026 - Pastoral Letter

Dear United Parish,

'A Happy New Year'

So begins 2026:

- On January 1st Bulgaria officially adopts the Euro.
- On January 28th the Rt Revd & Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE legally becomes the Archbishop of Canterbury and will be officially installed in March.
- February will see the start of the Winter Olympics in Milan.
- 'Toy Story 5' will be released on 19th June.
- There will be a solar eclipse on August 12th.
- The Mid-Term elections take place in the USA in November.

What has caught my imagination most though about 2026, is the fact that on November 13th, NASA's Voyager 1, will become the first human-made object to reach a distance of one light-day from Earth, about 16 billion miles away. Currently travelling at 38,027 mph it is making its way through space on a journey that started on September 5th, 1977.

I find Voyager 1's 50 year journey truly mind-blowing.

However, having reflected on this when I learnt of it recently, its importance paled into insignificance once contrasted to this verse from Genesis: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1) That is some statement, that sits beside another verse from the other end of the Bible: *"Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away'"* (Revelation 21:1)

Whatever happens this coming year, whether planned or unplanned, it comes in the presence of God, the one who revealed himself in a vision to St John exiled on the island of Patmos, recorded in Revelation chapter 1, in these words: *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

This is the Creator of all, who we have just reminded ourselves over Christmas was incarnated in Jesus Christ, Immanuel, the one who chose to be with us, in human form, sharing in the joys and sorrows of human existence.

He is with us, and will travel with us throughout 2026, but now as Jesus Christ the Lord, Resurrected and at the right hand of God to intercede for us.

Let us put our trust in Him at the beginning of this New Year, remembering his last words recorded in Matthew’s Gospel:

Matthew 28: 18 “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Have a great year!

Tony

Sunday 4th January 2026
2nd Sunday of Christmas

Opening prayer

God in Christ has revealed his glory. From the rising of the sun to its setting the Lord's name is greatly to be praised.

God of our days and years, we set this time apart for you. Form us in the likeness of Christ so that our lives may glorify you. Amen

Psalm 147 vs 13-21

He strengthens the bars of your gate
and blesses your people within him.

He grants peace to your borders
and satisfies you with the finest wheat.

He sends his command on the earth;
his word runs smoothly.

He spreads the snow like wool
and scatters the frost like ashes.

He hurls down hail like pebbles.

Who can withstand his icy blast?

He sends his word and melts them;
he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.

He has revealed his word to Jacob,
his laws and decrees to Israel.

He has done this for no other nation;
they do not know his laws.

Prayer of confession

Father God, we have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and humbly repent

for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ. Have mercy on us; that we might delight in your will and walk your ways to the glory of your name. Amen

Collect The Second Sunday of Christmas

Almighty God,
in the birth of your Son
you have poured on us the new light of your incarnate word,
and shown us the fullness of your love:
that we may know the fullness of his joy;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen

Bible Reading John 1 vs 10-18

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God-children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified concerning him. He cried out saying, 'This is the one I spoke about when I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made himself known.

Reflection *(by Margaret)*

The saying goes: 'Life is a Tapestry'

We start our individual lives with a blank canvas and as we journey through life, the canvas creates a design made up of many different experiences, moments and connections, which are intricately woven together to form a complete and complex picture.

The opening section of John's Gospel is perhaps one of the greatest pieces of Christian writing ever crafted. In it are woven great themes: life and light, creation and glory, grace and truth, Christ human and Christ Divine, woven like the richest threads into a wonderful vivid tapestry, the most gifted pieces of needlework ever.

John brilliantly tells us that Jesus, the 'Word', was there from the beginning of time and yet is also everlasting and eternal. Jesus is the source of life and light for people, of every generation, everywhere in the world. And that ultimately means you and me in this world and the next.

The opening of John's Gospel, is the start of a beautiful and splendid tapestry that is viewed by many with awe and wonder, through which John unveils the 'Word', so that we all can learn, no matter what age we are, to understand Jesus better and get to know his loving embrace, because, "all things came into being through him".

Every year we rejoice in his coming as a baby born in Bethlehem, the start of that blank canvas. Every year we journey with Jesus and witness his ministry and hear his teaching, those coloured threads are woven revealingly into the tapestry. Through the tapestry we begin to see who Jesus is and why he came in earthly ministry to share his love, God's love with us all. His care and concern for all people.

As he holds out his arms of love to the outcast; through his healing for those who struggle in body, mind and spirit, and to us all as we journey through life; God's love knows no limits, we see God in action, God on earth. Here are the threads.

As the tapestry is nearing its completion we begin to see Jesus as he truly is, the Son of God, human and divine. We begin to understand, his grace and his glory through his obedience to God's will and his love, demonstrated in self-sacrifice at Easter on the cross.

John wrote, 'He was in the world...yet the world knew him not.'

We have to ask ourselves, do we know Jesus? Do we see him in everyone we meet, in every place that we journey through life, in all that we do and say, the here and now?

The wonderful warmth and joy of the Christmas story helps us, and inspires us to see Christ and his glory, everywhere and in everyone. It is then that we can truly begin to see God, and see the whole rich colourful wonderful tapestry, from the crib to the cross.

And our individual lives are threads of that tapestry. We are called to add to its richness and vibrancy.

So as we continue to celebrate this Christmastide let us be aware on a daily basis, as we continue to weave ourselves with our Lord Jesus. Amen

Prayer

Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth.

God of grace and truth, your eternal Word brought life to birth and brings us to new birth in Jesus Christ.

Give strength and courage to your Church to testify to your saving presence. Send us to be witnesses to your light.

God of grace and truth, inspire with justice and mercy all to whom is given the responsibility of government across our fragile and broken world. Guide all nations in the way of peace.

God of grace and truth, illumine our hearts to resolve to follow you more clearly in this New Year. Forgive the sins of past mistakes and wilful neglect. Bring to fruition the purposes of your love.

God of grace and truth, hear our prayers for all who unwell at this time, especially those in hospital or hospice care, and all those who keep vigil by their side. Fill our hearts with the songs of gladness.

God of grace and truth, comfort all those who mourn and bring to your eternal city all those who have died.

Turn our sorrow into dancing and our mourning into joy.

A time for personal prayer

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 today 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

Hymn: We have Gospel to proclaim

We have a Gospel to proclaim
good news for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of our Saviours name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem
not in a royal house or hall
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvery,
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross;
for all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
The gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Final Prayer and Blessing:

God our Father,

you have made known to us again the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him until the day dawns and Christ
the Morning Star rises in our hearts.

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary revealed in his glory,
worshipped by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed
throughout the world, exalted to the highest heavens.

Blessed be God our strength and our salvation Amen

Rejoicing that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are with us wherever we
are. Amen

Sunday 11th January 2026

The Covenant Service

Here is a shortened version of the service we will share with our Methodist friends.

Call to Worship

Beloved in Christ, we come to renew our covenant with God.

We gather to offer ourselves afresh, trusting in the grace that has brought us this far and will lead us on.

The Covenant Invitation

Sisters and brothers in Christ, the Christian life is a life of commitment.

Today we come to renew the covenant

that God has made with us and that we have made with God.

Let us give ourselves to God, trusting in God's strength and mercy.

The Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you or brought low for you.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.

Bible Reading Romans 12 vs 1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Reflection On the Covenant Service

The Methodist Covenant Service was shaped in the eighteenth century by John Wesley, who longed for a simple way for ordinary Christians to renew their commitment to God together. Wesley believed that holiness was not a private journey but a shared life within the body of Christ. The Covenant Prayer grew from this conviction. It expresses a willing surrender to the love and calling of God, offered not in fear but in trust that God desires our good.

Wesley adapted the idea of covenant from biblical themes. In Scripture, a covenant is a bond of love and faithfulness established by God. The people of Israel are invited to respond with their whole lives. The Covenant Service follows this pattern. God offers grace first. The people answer by offering themselves. The structure is not a bargain but a relationship. It rests on the belief that God holds us, guides us and restores us.

For Methodists, the service became a yearly touchstone. It recalls the seriousness of discipleship while grounding that seriousness in assurance and joy. Many worshippers describe it as a moment of deep honesty before God.

The prayer is stark, yet it is spoken within the safety of divine compassion. It recognises that our lives may carry both fullness and emptiness, both opportunity and limitation. All of it can be entrusted to God, who works through every circumstance.

This spirituality has a resonance that reaches beyond Methodism. Anglicans often find that the Covenant Prayer echoes the promises of baptism and confirmation.

The heart of Anglican devotion is a desire to live faithfully within the call of God, strengthened by word and sacrament. The Covenant Service makes that desire explicit. It places our daily choices within a larger pattern of grace. It invites us to remember that our lives are not accidents of circumstance, but gifts held within the purposes of God.

Both Methodist and Anglican traditions affirm that God draws us into communion and shapes us over time. A yearly covenant renewal can become a moment of recollection and realignment. It helps us hold together trust and obedience, personal devotion and corporate belonging. It is not about dramatic self-renunciation but about opening our lives to the gentle and steady work of the Spirit.

Our post-modern secular world often values autonomy above relationship, and here the Covenant Prayer stands as a quiet counter point. It reminds us that true freedom is found in communion with God. It allows us to offer our hopes and our limits without fear. And it assures us that the God to whom we yield ourselves is faithful and compassionate. For both Methodists and Anglicans, this service invites us to walk into a new year with clarity, humility and hope, held in the everlasting covenant of divine love.

Prayer After the Covenant

Faithful God, you have called us to yourself
and bound us in love.

Keep us steadfast in this covenant.

Strengthen us for service and fill us with your joy and peace
in Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

May the God of grace establish you in every good work.

May Christ walk beside you.

May the Holy Spirit fill you with courage and hope.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee,
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee,
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose,
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee,
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Sunday 18th January 2026
Second Sunday after Epiphany

Opening Prayers

O Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. (*Isaiah 60.1*)

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading

John 2 vs 1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴ And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' ⁵ His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him,

Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.’¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Reflection *(by Jacky)*



What draws your attention when reading today's gospel reading, or when you look at the stained glass depiction of the scene?

For me it is that Mary is standing close to her Son, watching Him with loving tenderness. One of the things the Wedding at Cana draws our attention to is the relationship between Jesus and Mary.

To our modern Western ears, Jesus addressing his mother as her, as “woman” sounds disrespectful, but it was a very respectful form of address at the time.

Now that we can put our worry about that aside, we understand that we are witnessing a scene filled with warmth, trust and understanding. Mary is at the wedding, not only as His mother but also as one who steps gently into the needs of others. Her simple words in the Gospel, that the wine has run out, reveal a heart that notices, cares and acts.

We see that she is both attentive and trusting. The artist has given her a soft, steady presence.

Maybe this can lead us to reflect on what it means to place our needs before Christ and to trust His response. Mary’s faith in Jesus opens the way for His first sign.

Interestingly, the only other moment when Jesus calls Mary “woman” is at the cross, when He entrusts her to the care of the beloved disciple. In that moment Jesus is expanding the meaning of family to include all follow Him. Maybe at Cana we are witnessing the first widening of Jesus’ inclusive, expansive, abundant love.

This picture invites us to see Mary as the one who stands alongside Jesus and alongside us, pointing us towards Jesus with calm certainty. It reminds us that His grace often begins in moments where compassion meets faith, just as it did in that first miracle at Cana.

The Benedictus (*The Song of Zechariah*)

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors,
and to remember his holy covenant.

5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
6 Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
8 To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
9 In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Prayers

Take some time to offer to God your own prayers.

The Collect for 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

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 Lord's Prayer

Awaiting his coming in glory, 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.

The Conclusion

May the Lord, when he comes, find us watching and waiting.
Let us bless the Lord, thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word –
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same –
his holy name: the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure:
tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Sunday 25th January 2026
Epiphany 3

Introduction

Today on this third Sunday of Epiphany, the gospel theme is the calling of the first disciples and their willingness to follow Jesus 'immediately'.

Collect for 3rd Sunday of Epiphany

Give us grace Oh Lord to answer readily the call of our Saviour Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of His salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of His wonderful works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Psalm for Epiphany 3

A psalm of David - Psalm 27 vs 1-11

¹Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; ²for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. ³Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. ⁴Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: ⁶He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. ⁷Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. ⁸Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. ⁹For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. ¹⁰A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. ¹¹But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.

Gospel reading - Matthew 4 vs 12-23

Jesus Begins to Preach and then calls His first disciples

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali ¹⁴ to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. ²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Reflection *(by Brian)*

In today's gospel, we learn that Jesus leaves His childhood home (Nazareth), and moves His centre of operations to the village of Capernaum in Galilee. From here His life of ministry and His work of salvation began. The catalyst appears to be the imprisonment of John the Baptist. This district of Galilee is the most northerly in Palestine. It is not a large district, being only 50 miles N/S and 25 E/W. However, it has advantages as far as Jesus is concerned. Firstly, being by the lake (Galilee), it is a fertile area, rich in resources.

Hence, the population density is high. Secondly, since it is surrounded by Gentile districts it is open to new ideas and used to change. Thirdly, it is on a trade route. Thus, the move to Capernaum is strategic. Matthew tells us Jesus starts to 'proclaim' the Kingdom. Proclaiming is what heralds do when they speak on behalf of a King.

With His base set up, Jesus now calls His first disciples, two sets of fishermen. Peter and Andrew are called first and then James and John. Of significance is that the calling initiative comes from Jesus and that they immediately leave their nets and follow Him. They do not say "Please wait while we finish here" or "wait until we sell these fish". Matthew wants to emphasise the response was immediate. This implies that the four somehow knew Jesus, had followed His ministry and were already familiar with Him. My guess, based on verse 17 (above) is that they had already heard Him in the synagogue preaching and were inspired by His words and obvious charisma. That charisma would eventually attract 5000 to His missions.

Even though it is many years ago, I can still vividly remember being inspired by that charisma of Jesus. I was a teenager in the church youth club and went on a young people's holiday where the youth leader, at the end of an inspiring talk, invited people to come forward if they wanted to follow Jesus. I went forward and as they say, the rest is history.

What about you then? Why not spend a minute or two thinking about your own faith journey, how you followed Jesus? Here you are reading this At-Home booklet so you too, like me are attracted by Jesus and somehow or other responded by following Him. So, stop, muse, meditate, pray and worship. Thank God for your own journey to this point.

Personal prayer:

Following on from the above reflection, why not start your prayers by saying the General Thanksgiving:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

You could then go onto pray for what is on your mind at the moment and pray for those you know who would value your prayers.

Hymn. Why not say or indeed sing the following hymn:

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

Oh, let me feel Thee near me;
The world is ever near;
see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

Oh, let me hear Thee speaking,
In accents clear and still
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will;
Oh, speak to reassure me,
To hasten, or control
Oh, speak, and make me listen, Thou Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
To all who follow Thee
That where Thou art in glory
There shall Thy servant be;
And Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Oh, give me grace to follow,
My Master and my Friend.

Oh, let me see Thy footmarks,
And in them plant mine own;
My hope to follow duly
Is in Thy strength alone.
Oh, guide me, call me, draw me,
Uphold me to the end;
And then to rest receive me,
My Saviour and my Friend.

Thanksgiving Prayer

Dear Father, thank You for our fellowship and for calling us together to worship and grow. Keep us united in love, rooted in grace, and focused on the mission you've given us. As we go into this week ahead, may we walk in step with your Spirit and reflect your heart in everything we do. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.