

Sunday 15th December 2024: Third Sunday in Advent

For use by the Central Norfolk Circuit at 10.30 am or some other suitable time.



Theme for today is “Prepare the way for the Lord”

Our call to worship:

Deck the halls and light the candles. Prepare the way!

Open the doors and sing a song of hope. Prepare the way!

Make space in our hearts for a new kind of love. Christ is coming. Prepare the way!

Hymn: Stf 165 Advent candles tell their story (first three verses)

Prayers

Loving Heavenly Father,

We come with joy worshipping all that you are, all that you mean to us, we come as your faithful people. As we prepare to celebrate your birthday – the day of you coming here on earth, to meet us, to stand among us – be at one with us sharing our thoughts and feeling our deepest needs. We ask that, as we approach this Christmas period, you will ignite us afresh with the flame of your love, sharing the Good News with those whom we meet. So all the world will come to know the power of your love, peace and forgiveness.

In Jesus Christ we pray

Amen

Introduction:

As Advent progresses, the excitement of children reaches fever pitch how excited are we about the coming of the Christ child into the world

Hymn: StF 178 H&P 83 Long ago, prophets knew

Bible readings: Zephaniah 3: 14-20 Philippians 4, 4-7 and Luke 3: 7-18

A message from a Circuit Friend

Our readings today give us lots of things to think about as we move into the third Sunday of Advent.

We read in Zephaniah, (3: 14-20) one of the shortest books in the Old Testament, a message proclaiming judgment and restoration ‘The Day of the Lord’ these verses end on a jubilant note in a song of joy and hope. Looking forward to things to come. This of course can be a difficult read at this present time! At the time of writing this there had just been a cease fire between Israel and the Lebanon and the joy and hope on people’s faces as they were returning to their homes was wonderful to see. Even though we are a long way from that situation and cannot really comprehend the reality of it all we share their relief and thankfulness. We also pray for more peaceful solutions to be achieved. Then we have Paul’s letter to the Philippians, (4: 4 -7) written after the birth, death and resurrection, of Christ hundreds of years later. Christ came to bring peace hope and forgiveness, he came to give a new perspective, a new way of thinking, a new commandment, love one another. Paul is carrying out the work that Jesus began, preaching the good news and assuring them that the Lord is near, and he is waiting to listen to their needs. He tells the people of Philippi to rejoice in the Lord always and not to worry, God is near he is in the midst of everything. Something that we must hold on to today.

In Luke’s gospel (3: 7-18) we have John the Baptist bursting on the scene in a somewhat explosive manor, seemingly breathing fire and brimstone and not really looking like someone you would expect to be a messenger proclaiming the coming of the Messiah! But he certainly was making people sit up and take notice, giving them a real shake up! As he was sent to do – preparing the people, preparing the way. When I read this passage and of John’s role, I always think of the part in Handel’s Messiah ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’ it is such a moving and striking piece with a fanfare of strings. It creates an image of these people being reformed in readiness. In this passage in Luke, John responds to their questions “What should we do” by speaking of the one what is to come, and telling them the right way to behave, the right way to live. These people were filled with expectation – they were ready!

As we draw ever closer and the noise and hustle and bustle of ‘Christmas’ gets louder and louder let us take time to ‘Hush the Noise’ ask ourselves:

- What should we do? This is a good starting point.
- Are we prepared?
- Are we ready for the Joy that is to come?
- Are we ready to have our lives changed?

We will celebrate the birth of Christ, but we will, and we should, but also looking and celebrating with joy the man he was to become, the Saviour of the world.

From Dee Moden one of our Local Preachers.

Hymn: StF 330 H&P 77 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Prayers of Intercession

Spend a moment thinking about the season. Perhaps this is a joyful time for you but, perhaps, it brings up hard memories and other challenges. As you reflect on these things, offer them to God.

God of love, we recall how Elizabeth and Mary supported one another. We thank you for the support that we have received from other people and pray that we might see opportunities to help and support others. Then, for those things that we can't do, we place those people and situations into your caring hands.

God of love, we recall how you came to a forgotten backwater and bring to mind those in our society who are forgotten or marginalized. We pray that governments and individuals will be alert to those needs and will take action. Help us not to turn blind eyes on those in need.

God of love, we recall that Mary recognized how you were blessing her even though things would not have been easy. We reach out to receive your blessings for ourselves but also remember those who are not in a place to do that for themselves. Send your blessings Lord. Amen

Offer to God your offertory for the week, and say the Lord's Prayer...

Hymn: StF 167 Colours of day dawn into the mind

Closing blessing –

Go out to celebrate in love and laughter. Go as lights for the world! Shine in the darkness, act justly, and walk humbly with your God, in whose name we pray. Amen