

Bible Notes

October – December
2026

Be Prepared

Daily Bible Readings
Leading to
Advent
&
Christmas.

October 1st

Luke 5 vv 1-16

Here we are at the beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry. He has returned from His forty days of fasting & temptation in the wilderness. We have been reminded of His genealogy: Son of Mary, Son of Adam, Son of Man, Son of God (Luke 3²³⁻³⁸). He has revealed Himself and been rejected in the synagogue at Nazareth. *He came to His own & His own received Him not* – not the people He grew up with, not the Jews, the chosen people, not the world He came to save. But He teaches, He preaches, He heals the sick & casts out demons.

Now Jesus recruits the fishermen to be His disciples and apostles. The miracle He performs, leads Peter to worship & acknowledge his own unworthiness in the Presence of God. It was the same for the prophet Isaiah in his vision of God (Isaiah 6). As God cleanses & sends Isaiah, so Jesus tells the fishermen to fear not, but join Him in catching men.

Jesus then heals & cleanses the man suffering from what was not only a horrible disease, but also isolated the sufferer from human contact. One of the things the late Princess Diana is remembered for is that she got close to people suffering from AIDs which was a terrible illness (incurable at that time), believed to be much more contagious than it actually is, and regarded by some as punishment for sin.

Jesus forgives. He heals. He makes clean. What is required of us is faith.

October 2nd

Amos 5 vv 1-17

Amos very much didn't want to be a prophet, but God sent him anyway. The message, God's Word, is urgent. In Israel some grow rich at the expenses of the poor. There is no justice. The wealthy lack compassion. The courts are corrupt. Business people are greedy and fraudulent. Religion is a sham. People worship – they devote their lives to - what can never satisfy – lies, false gods, money power. In choosing evil over good, they equally choose death rather than life. Such a nation is doomed. The only recourse is to turn to the LORD in a spirit of repentance. To what extent do you think today's world resembles Israel in the time of the prophet Amos (about 760BC)?

October 3rd

Ephesians 4 vv 1-24

What does it mean to be a member of the Church? St Paul gives us a lot to think about in this passage. God has made every one of us for a purpose. We are all different. He gives each one of us a part to play.

We are Christians. We are baptised in faith. We are repentant of our sins. We are part of the Body. We belong to one another. We belong to Jesus.

As we each play our part in God's work, we build one another up into the likeness of Christ. We build His Church – in number & stature – by which I mean that we share our faith with others so that they too come to faith & the Church grows larger in number & also that we grow better, that we become more Christlike. A human body grows bigger (from childhood to early adulthood). We grow, fitter, wiser & stronger as we mature.

Some of us have particular vocations as ministers of various kinds. We are bound to respect & prayerfully to support our bishops & pastors.

The task in which we participate is God's work & it is possible for us to take part because God suffuses us with His grace: in Christian fellowship, in prayer, in the Sacraments & in His Word.

October 4th (Trinity 18)

I Corinthians 1 vv 4-8

Do we take time to give thanks to God for our fellow Christians? That they are God's people? That they are our companions on the way? That we enjoy their fellowship? Do we pray for one another? Not everybody is easy to get on with! But our Christian calling is to love them as Christ loves us. Paul give thanks because his fellow Christians are what they are by the grace of God, that God enriches us in the Spirit, that He keeps us safe in His love that He has prepared a place for us.

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

October 5th

Jonah 1 vv 1-17

God had a task for Jonah to perform & Jonah didn't want to do it. He was probably afraid of what the Ninevites would do to him. He didn't particularly want them to be saved. They didn't deserve God's mercy. They were a wicked lot who had done a great deal of harm to Israel.

But nobody deserves God's mercy. God loves us & Jonah & the Ninevites just because He is God & God is love.

Jonah tries to escape God, but he can't. There is no place from which God is absent – a comforting assurance when we acknowledge that we need Him, a terrible warning if perversely we hope to escape Him.

The pagan seamen tried to save Jonah. They weren't without conscience. We all have consciences and are judged by how conscientious we are. How do we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts & in our lives?

Only God could save Jonah, which He did in order that Jonah could serve Him Whose service is perfect freedom.

October 6th

Jonah 3 vv 1-9

Jonah had no choice but to go to Nineveh and preach God's Word of Judgment. Do you think, perhaps, that there is sometimes a tendency to enjoy preaching judgment? It makes the preacher appear superior to the sinners whom he is condemning. Maybe there is some satisfaction in the thought that the wicked get their comeuppance. They deserve it. Their punishment is only right. Punishing the perpetrator levels up the scales of justice, somehow cancelling the suffering he inflicted on his victims.

God is just. There is a final judgment. The victims of injustice will be vindicated. But God desireth not the death of a sinner. We are all sinners. We can only be saved by God's grace. We can all be saved by God's grace, even the Ninevites. But grace is free. It isn't cheap. It is priceless. The salvation of us all is effected by the Death of His Son.

October 7th

Luke 8 vv 1-26

The Parable of the Sower is well known. Understanding it in the light of Scripture, the Word of God is Christ. Where the Word takes root, it brings forth fruit, the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness & temperance. The labourer in God's Kingdom *gather[eth] fruit unto eternal life*. The Sower is God Himself and His Word does not return to Him void. God's Word accomplishes His purposes. Human beings may be too hard-hearted to receive Him (the sin against the Holy Ghost?), too busy to attend to what really matters or too easily discouraged. We pray for God's grace that we and the people we pray for may be ready to receive the Word in our hearts, that we may *receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save [y]our souls*. In the Bible, to hear the Word is to obey. If we live by God's Word, we are lights of the world. But there is no hiding place for the deeds of darkness. If we hear God's Word & do it, we are God's family. The Christian life is not always easy & stress free. Far from it. But Jesus is in the same boat as us. He is the Son of God. We can trust in Him.

October 8th

Psalms 42&43

Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul: and why art thou so disquieted within me.

We'll take these two psalms together as they are almost certainly two parts of the same composition. I remember reading and being consoled by the above verse reading these psalms when I was a teenager. They are hard to translate from the Hebrew, but deeply moving. At our best, we long for God. We may long for Him most earnestly when we are at our lowest, when perhaps other people mock us for trusting in a God Who appears to have let us down. We might even feel like that ourselves if bad things have happened to us despite our best efforts to do the right thing. In such circumstances, we can look back on more joyful times in the past & believe that, *while heaviness may endure for the night, joy comes in the morning*. Our hearts, our prayers, resonate with God. We reach out to Him & He to us. God hasn't forgotten us & He will bring us to the place of eternal worship, where there is joy forever more. We can trust in Him.

These notes were subtitled *Daily Bible Readings Leading to Advent & Christmas*. You might be wondering where I found them & in what way they are leading up to Advent & Christmas. What I've done is to take one of the readings appointed for each date in the last three months of the year in the Book of Common Prayer. In October, we are still (as we have been throughout the year) simply reading the Bible in order as it comes. On special days like Christmas or saints days, there are special readings appointed for their relevance to the special day. The rest of the time, we read through the Bible for what it can teach us, our understanding moulded by our contemplation of what God has to teach us. This is different from our choosing the passages we want to read. Choosing what we read is good when we are looking for something in particular - eg comfort, guidance, a good story, promises, warnings, assurance, etc. – but it runs the risk of avoiding passages which challenge us, turning a deaf ear when God's Word is telling us things we'd rather not hear – (Luke) ²⁷ *But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,* ²⁸ *Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.* ²⁹ *And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.* ³⁰ *Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.* ³¹ *And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.* ³² *For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.* Having made those general points, Micah 5² and the verses following are often read at our Christmas services. In the light of the New Testament, we understand that they are a prophecy of the Birth of Jesus. But the meaning and relevance of the rest of the chapter may be unclear to us. The original context is the political & military situation in the Middle East in the time the prophecy was given (8th century BC), which was as bloody and confused as it is day. But certain points emerge which are as relevant today as they were then.

- God is in overall control of human history.
- God is just and merciful.
- He is the Saviour of those who put their trust in Him.
- God sends His Son to overcome evil with love.

October 10th

Luke 9 vv 28-50

The Word was made flesh & dwelt among us. Micah's prophecy is fulfilled in the birth of a human child who grows to be a man & become a great teacher & healer, an example to us all. This man is revealed to be the Son of God, God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy, Blessed & Glorious Trinity. Already revealed in the Old Testament – the Law & the Prophets, Moses & Elijah – His victory over sin, the world and the devil is accomplished by His Death, the greatest example of self-sacrificial love in the entire course of history.

So the boy is cured. Our calling as disciples is to hear the Word of God & to follow Him in the way of the Cross, which paradoxically is the path of eternal life. *He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* Who then is the greatest? Dare we despise those who seek to follow Jesus in a different way, a different denomination of the Church, from our own? Or do we pray *That they may be one* in a spirit of humility?

October 11th (Trinity 19)

Colossians 1 vv 1-20

It's a privilege to be a Christian – to know God & Jesus Christ Whom He has sent, by His grace to have received the gift of eternal life. Can you understand why we are sometimes reluctant to take part in the life of His Church?

Thank God for one another: for love, hope, truth. Bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. Behave as Christian people. We can fulfil God's purposes for our lives in the strength which He has given us. He has made us what we are – citizens of heaven – by Jesus Who is everything Paul says of Him: God's manifestation of Himself, the One through Whom, by Whom & for Whom all things exist, the Mediator, the Priest, the Atoning Sacrifice, as well as our brother & companion on the way.

O GOD, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee; Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

October 12th

Psalm 63

I'm writing these notes in the midst of a drought. It has been very hot. We have had drying winds. I'm watering my garden every evening, now having to fill the can from the tap, because my rain butts have run dry. Hopefully, we shan't get to the point when can't even do that. Yields are down for the farmers. Wild fires are breaking out in various places. We long for rain. Without any water, we'd die of thirst. Where there is insufficient water, there is little food because the crops don't grow. Without water we can't wash ourselves or our clothes. It's not going to get that bad in the UK, but it does in some parts of the world & may become worse with global warming.

An apt analogy then for our utter dependence on God: to be washed clean, to receive nourishment, to live. He is always present with us – even in bed! We can talk to Him all the time. He is our Saviour.

The psalmist longs for the death of his enemies. We find these sentiments expressed in the psalms uncomfortable – though most of us believe that it is right to fight in a just cause. Yet Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him and taught us to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to do good to them that hate us and to pray for them which spitefully use us & hate us. So there's a tension!

One interesting commentary I read suggested that, when we read psalms in which the psalmist prays for the downfall of his enemies, we should ask ourselves whether we ever behave in such a way as to make other people long for our downfall?

October 13th

Luke 11 vv 1-29

Jesus teaches us to pray. It is good to pray the Lord's Prayer, to pray with Him in His words. If we think about these words, they have a tremendous depth of meaning. But we can pray in any words or without words. God is our Father and freely gives us what we need – the gift of His Holy Spirit. Don't give up on praying.

There are those who wilfully or ignorantly misunderstand. If we are open to the Word of God, we recognise His followers by their works. *By their fruits ye shall know them.*

One is either a Christian or one is not. Maybe it can be worse to go through the motions of beginning to follow Christ only to turn back to sin, the world & the devil, than never to have started in the Way. I do think, however, that unless one really hardens one's heart against Him, God will provide a way to return to Him. To hear His word & keep it is to share the blessings of Mary, more even than what she experienced in her physical motherhood of the Son of God.

October 14th

Colossians 3 vv 1-17

I can't remember a time when I wasn't a Christian. I was baptized as a baby. I was prayed for & prayed with & taught to pray myself. I learned the bible stories. I attended Sunday School & Church. I became a regular communicant. Maybe it was the same for you. Or maybe you had a conversion experience. You weren't a Christian earlier in your life, but, at some stage, you became a believer. I'm thankful that I was brought up to be a Christian & that I have always known my heavenly Father, but perhaps we cradle Christians take it all too much for granted. We don't notice the difference that Christ makes in our lives. We've never known anything different. Our Christianity can be merely conventional. We don't recognise the need to cease to be conformed to this world & to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12²). In today's passage, St Paul shows us what a wonderful thing it is to be a Christian, transcending everything else about us, transforming us into the likeness of Christ. Whatever our race or worldly status, we are one in the Body of Christ. We need to act like it.

October 15th

Haggai 1 vv 1-15

These are the descendants of the Jews who were exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem, when he destroyed the Temple & left the city in ruins. They have been allowed to return and it falls to them to rebuild the Temple. Only they procrastinate. It is never the right time to make a start. There are always other important things to do, excuses for not doing the work

that God requires of them. They discover that, because their priorities are wrong, they don't completely succeed at anything else either. They never have time to do God's work & nothing else they do bears as much fruit as it ought, Could it be that the reason that we as a nation are finding it so hard to manage our affairs is that we have sidelined God? Could it be that the reason why so many people are dissatisfied with their lives is because they don't put first the only One Who can truly satisfy our needs? Isaiah 55² *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

October 16th

Haggai 2 vv 1-9

Some of those present were old enough to remember Solomon's Temple before it was knocked down by Nebuchadnezzar. They could see that the house Zerubbabel & Joshua were building had a long way to go before it could equal the original temple. As we feebly struggle, we can't help making comparisons with past glories. After the Second World War, there was a great building programme to provide Churches for the new housing developments. Most places had their own parish Church & their own vicars or rectors. There would have been at least two services a day plus Sunday Schools. Billy Graham's missions had affected millions of people in the US, the UK & in many parts of the world. There was a good supply of men pursuing vocations to the priesthood or the monastic life. Especially under the leadership of Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple, the Church of England played a major part in the establishment of the welfare state. So where did it all go wrong? There are many causes for this slump, but among them, must be the failure of people in countries like ours to prioritise serving God above everything else. The seed fell on stony ground or was choked by weeds.

The assurance is, however, that, if we are faithful in doing God's work, the glories to come will exceed the glories of the past. I believe that we need a Church with more grace & less law, more Spirit & less flesh, more hope & less process, more faith & less caution, more initiative & less bureaucracy.

October 17th

Psalm 88

I have seen this described as the only psalm without any hope. I'm sure this is wrong, but it is true that the psalmist writes from a position of deep misery. If you read the psalms in course in your daily worship, it may happen that you read this one on a day when you yourself are feeling very low. But you might also read it on a day when you are feeling very happy. Either way, you might take time to think of other people who might be in misery, possibly worse than anything you or I are likely to experience ever. We could pray for them.

Psalm 88 is one of the psalms appointed for Good Friday. Jesus experienced a grief greater than anything we could ever imagine. In doing so, He shares our pain. He knows what it is to be us. *We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities* (Hebrews 4¹⁵). His sacrifice of Himself on the Cross is the propitiation of all our sins. Psalm 88 is, therefore, very far from being a psalm without hope. Christ crucified is *the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast* (Hebrews 6^{18&19}).

October 18th (St Luke)

Luke 10 vv 1-7

The Temple we are building is not a temple made with human hands. It is good to have fine buildings, built to the glory of God, places of prayer, places to meet, in themselves a witness to the Truth. But the New Testament Church had no buildings. The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ, the fellowship of all believers. All Christians are called to bear witness to the Gospel, but some are called to specific vocations within the Church. So we pray for vocations. I don't think that twenty first century clergy & missionaries need necessarily to go about their work with so little preparation & so few resources as these seventy, but possibly we have gone too far the other way treating clergy as though they were middle class professionals.

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

October 19th

Zechariah 4 vv 1-14

In the original context, God is assuring Joshua & Zerubbabel that He is with them and that, therefore, they will be able to finish the work of constructing the Temple. Joshua represents the anointed high priest & Zerubbabel the anointed royal priest. Jesus fulfils all prophecy. In His own person, He is both Priest & King, anointed with the Holy Spirit, pouring out His Spirit on the Church and the world. While we might think that building God's Temple is a hopeless task, we are assured that it is not. We are not to despise small things. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the LORD of hosts.* Revival can happen, but only by God's grace working through His faithful people.

O ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that though thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 20th

I Thessalonians 5 vv 1-28

What a wonderful chapter! We are to live in such a way as always to be ready for the Lord's return & the Last Judgement. We can rely on God to keep us for that day (v24). His gifts to us are faith and love and hope. We live by them in Christ. We live in Him whether on this earth or in the life to come. So we are in a fellowship of love with all those who have gone before us in the Lord and we shall see them again one day. That is a very comforting thought. Comfort (strengthen) one another. Edify (build up) one another. It is too easy to put other people down and unchristian. We are to support one another in our Christian lives.

It isn't always easy, but we are obliged to appreciate & value those who exercise authority over us, even when we think they are wrong!

We'd do well to learn by heart vv 15-22. I think that there is a danger that legalism, bureaucracy & inertia in the C of E tend to quench the Spirit. We need to be on our guard for that.

Paul concludes with a corporate blessing. We are members of one another.

October 21st

Luke 15 vv 11-32

This is one of our Lord's best known parables. It follows the parables of the lost sheep & the lost coin. In all three examples, the return of what was lost is deeply desired & there is great rejoicing when it is found. The sting in the tail with regard to the prodigal son is that his brother resents his return and all this fuss made over the lad who had rejected his family, taken his share out of the family farm & returned only when he was (literally) in a mess. The younger son was the one who had done wrong and the older youth had some justification in believing that he had been hard done by. It isn't easy to rejoice when other people get better than they deserve and we don't receive the rewards we think we're entitled to. But, if we are to love as God loves, it's something we are required to do. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* (Matthew 5⁴⁸).

October 22nd

Zechariah 9 vv 9-17

We read the first three verses of this reading as a prophecy of Palm Sunday. The King rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. He comes in peace, riding an ass, not a war horse. He is humble & meek & yet He is the King of Kings & Lord of Lords. The Old Testament context is the conflict between the Jews & the successors of Alexander the Great who ruled the Holy Land for a period & tried to impose Greek culture on the Jews, contrary to their faith in the LORD, His Law & their customs. They would, with God's help, throw off the Greek yoke. In this world of sin, there are people who fight for fighting's sake (like Alexander who had no need to embark on a campaign of conquest), there are people who would take up arms to defend themselves & in the cause of justice & a small minority who would never fight for any reason. I'm in the second group, but the third group will be the ultimate victors. Isaiah 2: ⁴ *And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

Conquering kings their titles take
From the foes they captive make:
Jesus, by a nobler deed,
From the thousands He hath freed.

October 23rd

Luke 17 vv 1-19

The Gospels are very demanding. Our calling is to take up our cross & follow Jesus.

What are the offences Jesus means in vv 1&2? Could it be child abuse which I fear has always gone on? Where those with power interact with the vulnerable (especially in conditions of confidentiality) there will always be scope for bullying and abuse: in the Church, in the worlds of work & politics, in the military, and in the home.

Forgiveness isn't easy. Neither should it be. Can you think of people whom you find hard to forgive? You may be judging them unfairly. They may have done you actual harm. There is a distinction. Forgiveness isn't cheap. It cost Jesus His life. Our calling is to take up our cross & follow Jesus.

Faith is not something to measure out, so that, a really super Christian with lots of faith could uproot a tree and dump it in the sea whereas neither you nor I has enough faith to do that. It is God Who would move the tree (supposing He wanted it moved). Our having faith is simply a matter of trusting Him for what is right.

God doesn't owe us. We owe Him. We don't earn merit by doing God's work. We try to do God's work simply because we love Him.

Of the ten lepers, they were all cleansed of the disease, but the one who was made whole was the one who had faith to be thankful,

October 24th

I Timothy 1 vv 1-18

I believe in one, holy, catholic & apostolic Church.

Local churches, local Christian fellowships, parish churches are important. For many of us, the local Church is where we were baptized, where we were taught the faith, where we worship, where we serve & where we know that we are loved & supported. The local Church is very important to us. This is why I support *Save the Parish*. We mustn't forget, however, that our local Church is part of the whole Church, that one, holy, catholic & apostolic Church. St Paul keeps in

touch with the churches he has founded. He maintains fellowship & friendship with the people in them. He encourages them to support one another. He sends ministers like Timothy to keep them on the straight & narrow way. Bishops or elders are ordained in each of them to provide leadership & pastoral care. It is one Church & we are all members one of another.

As Christians we are called to build one another up (edify) in love. If we are filled with God's love, it is our nature to obey God's Law. Thus the written law is not for good people who are good instinctively, but for bad people who don't have it in them to be any better. Most of us are neither wholly good nor wholly bad. We seek grace to be good Christians, but we sometimes need the written rules to remind us what that means.

If Paul can be converted, anyone can! Praise God!

October 25th (Trinity 21)

John 4 vv 46-54

What a terrible thing, to have a son who is at the point of death. The lad's father prays Jesus to come down to his house & heal the boy. Many, many parents have prayed for their sick children. Some recover naturally or following medical intervention. There are miracles, but miracles are quite rare & never guaranteed. We couldn't all be healed of every disease just for the asking. Think of the implications of that. Is what Jesus means in v48 that we should have faith even though the child dies? We can trust God for the lad & we can trust Him for ourselves. We ought to be able to have faith in Jesus without signs & wonders. But the father persists & the boy is healed. In such circumstances, I would pray: pray for a natural recovery, pray for successful, medical treatment, pray for a miracle, pray for healing by whatever means. The last healing is death, but that seems harsh when the subject is a child. I'd pray for myself & all concerned to have faith however God answered our prayers.

GRANT, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 26th

Luke 19 vv 11-27

This is very like the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. Some people think that Matthew & Luke have told the same story in a differently nuanced way, but I am sure that many teachers have used the same material on different occasions, modifying it for the audience. I believe this is what has happened here. The disciples thought that the Kingdom of God would come when they reached Jerusalem with Jesus at their head. In a way, the Kingdom did come with His Death & Resurrection & the coming of the Holy Spirit, but the final consummation was still many centuries in the future. While we await that great day, we are required to do God's work in the world in accordance with the gifts & opportunities he has given us. There will be a reckoning as to what we have done with what God has given us. The man with one pound would have been fine if he'd put it to good use. Never think that the best you can do isn't worth doing. We sow, but God gives the increase. Use your talents even if you haven't much confidence in yourself. Each one of us is part of God's almighty plan. It is on His power that we depend. Some people reject the rule of Christ altogether, but He will return in glory to judge both the quick & the dead.

October 27th

Malachi 3 vv 13-18 & 4 vv 1-6

Some people had given up on God. If He exists at all, they might have said, He doesn't intervene in the affairs of this world. There is no punishment for the wicked. There is no blessing for the righteous. There is no providence, no meaning in your life. You might as well help yourself while you can look after number one, by fair means or foul. I guess that a lot of people think like that today. Yet they are totally wrong. There is justice. There is mercy. *The LORD whom ye seek shall suddenly come.* Malachi 1¹¹⁺ is often regarded as being fulfilled at least in part in Holy Communion. *For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen. saith the LORD of hosts.* Thus the people of God are nourished by the divine Presence, sustained in their life of faith & worship & assured of the final consummation.

October 28th (St Simon & St Jude)

Jude vv 1-8

God is not mocked.

We know that God is our loving heavenly Father, that He is merciful & that He doesn't desire the death of a sinner. But that doesn't mean that we can disrespect Him, disbelieve the Truth set forth in the Scriptures & the teaching of the Church, undermine those who bear authority within the Church and create disunity. Jude reminds us that we must *earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.*

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

October 29th

Luke 20 vv 1-26

The thing about Jesus was that He taught with authority. Everybody could see that. But where did His authority come from? He wasn't a Sadducee or a Pharisee, a lawyer or a scribe. He wasn't professionally trained. The authentic teaching of Jesus undermined the position of the people who saw themselves as the leaders of their communities. Our Lord's authority is divine. The political & religious authorities of the day couldn't or wouldn't accept that. They gave a politician's answer to His question about John the Baptist. They prevaricated because they daren't say what they truly believed, if they truly believed anything.

Time & again throughout history God had sought a response from the people to whom He had given so much. Time & again they & their leaders have responded by persecuting the messengers God has sent them. Human beings far too often behave like that. We finished up crucifying His Son & God makes a new start in Him, rejecting those who reject God (especially corrupt religious leaders) and making Jesus the cornerstone of the people of God.

We owe everything to God including obedience to Caesar as part of our service to *the only Ruler of princes.*

October 30th

Psalm 150

How do you expect to spend eternity? If you have faith in God & repent of your sins, by His grace, you will spend eternity praising God. It is a great joy to praise God here on earth, to sing hymns & psalms of praise, to join in the prayers of the Church, especially the Eucharistic Prayer: *through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and all glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end. Amen.*

Or to praise Him silently or in your own words as you go about your daily business.

October 31st

Luke 21 vv 5-38

The Samaritan woman at the well asked Jesus whether worship ought to be offered at Mt Gerizim in Samaria or in the Temple at Jerusalem. Jesus told her that the worship God requires is worship in spirit & in truth. The physical location of the worshipper is not of ultimate significance; what matters is that Christ dwells in us & we in Him.

Our Lord prophesies the destruction of the Temple, which occurred about forty years later. The Jews rebelled against the Romans and their revolt was put down savagely. Terrible things have happened in human history. They continue till the present day, as we know only too well. Jesus tells us to trust God. I came across these wise words about trusting God in dreadful times. *Faith in God is no longer understood as a guarantee of safety, but as a source of resilience. It is not the absence of fear, but the choice not to allow fear to destroy the soul or dictate actions. Faith becomes an inner light in the midst of darkness – a deep conviction that life still has meaning, even in the most difficult circumstances.*

There will be a final consummation when Jesus returns to judge both the quick & the dead. In all our troubles, we should look up because God's Kingdom is nigh.

We don't know when He will return. Our calling is always to live in such a way that we are ready.

November 1st (All Saints Day)

Matthew 5 vv 1-12

With these words, Jesus began His great Sermon on the Mount – three chapters in St Matthew’s Gospel. I remember reading some of them out loud to our group when we were in the Holy Land in the place where Jesus is supposed to have uttered them. On the one hand, the world would obviously be a much better place if we lived in accordance with His words. On the other hand, the devil, the world, our own human nature tell us that it is impossible to live according to His precepts. We shall be taken for mugs if we try. It would be easier to live in accordance with the Commandments of God if everybody else did. But we have to start somewhere and where else can we start from if we don’t start with ourselves?

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 2nd

II Timothy 3 vv 1-17

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Things can only get better was the song they sang when Tony Blair’s government came to power, but the solution to the world’s ills is not to be found in politics, economics or military solutions. They all have their part to play, but only insofar as human beings seek to live under God’s Commandments. Because so many of us can’t or won’t align our wills with God’s Will, things are likely to get worse. A feeble Church which compromises with sin, the world & the devil is the very opposite of the solution. It is only too possible to go through the motions, to have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. I’m thinking of those whose eyes are closed to the signs of the times, those who doubt that God is constantly working in the world, those who doubt the purpose of prayer & those who do not respect the Bible. *Take up thy cross and follow me*, says Jesus. *Pray constantly*, says St Paul, *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God*. Like Paul, we might experience persecution, yet, like him, we may *rejoice evermore*. *Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*

November 3rd

Luke 22 vv31-54

It is all or nothing with Jesus. Follow Him wholeheartedly or not all. All right in theory. Peter, the first to recognise Jesus as the Son of God, was confident that he could follow Jesus all the way. Jesus knew better. Jesus knows us through & through. He understands us & is full of compassion and mercy towards us. Peter will fail & be forgiven. Nevertheless he will *strengthen the brethren*. He will be key to the foundation of the Church. He will die a martyr's death – at Rome many years later. Jesus is fully human as well as wholly divine. His flesh shrank from the ordeal He was about to undergo as would ours. He prayed for deliverance as we should and accepted God's Will for His life as we ought. God sent an angel to comfort Jesus. We look to God to comfort us whatever trouble we might have to face. Keep praying. The sword (or fist or knife or gun) may be used legitimately in defence, especially of the innocent, and to enforce justice. But it is not ideal. It is not to be wielded in Gethsemane. In the Kingdom of God, swords are beaten into ploughshares. *Father, forgive them. For they not what they do.*

ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 4th

Psalm 19

If you haven't noticed or guessed already, I'm selecting this quarter's readings from those set for each day in the Book of Common Prayer. So, on 4th month, I could have chosen Psalm 22, which begins, *My God, my God, look upon me; why hast thou forsaken me.* These are words which Jesus Himself uttered on the Cross. The whole Psalm is a prophecy of the Crucifixion & we often use it on Maundy Thursday & Good Friday. Jesus takes on Himself all the sin & grief of the world. You get to v22 before you experience the resolution, the outcome of our Lord's anguish in the Salvation of the world. The Glory of Jesus, the Glory of God is the perfect expression of love in the sacrifice of self for the good of all. God's glory is manifested in an infinite number of ways. Psalm 19 celebrates the same glory of the same God in the wonderful order of nature – the laws of Science & the laws which establish justice and mercy.

November 5th

Luke 23 vv 1-26

The BBC has come under scrutiny after one of its educational resources for primary school children described Guy Fawkes as an "astonishing activist" and placed him alongside historical figures including Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks and Emmeline Pankhurst.

Guy Fawkes is an odd choice of hero. The Gunpowder Plot aimed to put a Roman Catholic on the throne of Britain by assassinating King James I and blowing up parliament. It is a terrible reminder that Christians whose Lord has commanded us to love one another have only too often sought to settle their differences by means which cannot be pleasing to Jesus. We no longer kill one another in this country, but we don't always settle our differences lovingly as Jesus would desire. Fawkes was tortured & sentenced to be hung, drawn & quartered, though he actually died at the hanging stage. The British authorities hardly acted with the justice and mercy which we ought to be able to expect from a supposedly Christian government.

They took Jesus for a threat both to the religious authorities & the state. In a sense He was, not because He intended to overthrow them by violence, but because His very Presence, the perfect Man, the image of the invisible God is a reproach to human sinners in whom the divine image is besmirched by the absence of pure love. He embodies what we could and should be. He is also the means by Whom our sins are forgiven when we are prepared to repent & the Source of the grace to amend our lives. Needless to say, even if Jesus had been guilty of the charges laid against Him, what was done to Him was unconscionable.

November 6th

Titus 3 vv 1-15

The Bible is the Word of God – all of it, not just the parts of it which we find congenial. Sometimes in my prayers, particularly when I pray for the work of the Bible Society, I pray for the Bible's translation into the languages of the world, for its distribution to all the peoples of the earth, for its interpretation and preaching, for its application. That last can be the tricky one. How do the universal & eternal truths which we read in the pages of Scripture apply to the way in which you & I live here & now? Titus 2 is perhaps harder than Titus 3. A lot of people might say that what Paul says about the obedience of women to their

husbands and slaves (or servants to their masters) is problematic today. Reading the first verse of chapter 3, we might question Paul's injunction to obey the functionaries of the Roman state. The principles are clear. Our sins are forgiven in Christ. Our duty is to live lives worthy of what Christ has done for us, to live righteous lives *in this present world*. We face challenges different from those experienced in first century Crete where Titus presided over the Church. But we meet them in accordance with the same principles.

November 7th

Luke 23 v50 – 24 v12

It was on the Cross that the Victory was won: the devil, defeated, death overcome, sin forgiven, man reconciled to God. But we only know this because Christ is risen His tomb is empty. He dwells among us. He dwells within us. He gives us His Spirit. We know that He shall come again. We cannot sufficiently celebrate Easter.

The day of
resurrection!
Earth, tell it out
abroad;
the Passover of
gladness,
the Passover of
God.
From death to life
eternal,
from earth unto
the sky,
our Christ hath
brought us over,
with hymns of
victory.

Our hearts be
pure from evil,
that we may see
aright
the Lord in rays
eternal
of resurrection
light;
and listening to
his accents,
may hear so calm
and plain
his own "All hail!"
and, hearing,
may raise the
victor strain.

Now let the
heavens be joyful!
Let earth her song
begin!
The round world
keep high
triumph,
and all that is
therein!
Let all things seen
and unseen
their notes in
gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord
hath risen,
our joy that hath
no end.

November 8th (Trinity 22, Remembrance Sunday)

Daniel 6 vv 1-28

Daniel & his companions Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were lads when Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, destroyed the city of Jerusalem & compelled many of its leading citizens to come to Babylon with him. The prophet Jeremiah instructed them to settle down, to make their homes there and to pray for its peace. It would be 70 years before they were coming home to Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar decided

to educate some of the brightest and best young men among the exiles so that they would serve him. Daniel, S, M & A remained true to their faith in the LORD. They were diligent in their studies. They worked hard, dependably & honestly & understandably rose to high positions, but they never compromised regarding their religion. Other courtiers became jealous of the promotions these foreigners received from Nebuchadnezzar and subsequent rulers and attempted to destroy them – Daniel in the lions’ den, S, M & A in a burning fiery furnace. See chapter 3. They weren’t intimidated & God saved them. We can’t, however, usually expect miracles, but we can say as S, M & A said (3¹⁷): *If so be, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up.*

LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 9th

Psalm 46

Daniel, S, M & A certainly found that God was their refuge & strength. The challenges they faced were considerably more dramatic than any that we are likely to be facing. But we do face challenges & the fact that they are more commonplace does not make them less daunting. What do you feel does get you down? It might be a big thing like impending redundancy or being diagnosed with an illness or having to take exams when you are not very confident of success. It could be that you’re troubled about a family rift or ill-feeling with neighbours. Perhaps you need to face up to major work on the house. And we can of course have butterflies about happy things like going on a date or starting a new job. How do we face the tumults of life? *Be still and know that I am God.* Ask God to help you to be still. Try to think rationally about your problems. Ask for wisdom. Pray. Consider how what you know from the Bible or the Church may guide you. Ask help from human friends & family.

1 Lord, Thy Word	who its truth
abideth,	believeth,
and our footsteps	light and joy
guideth;	receiveth.

2 When our foes
are near us,
then Thy Word
doth cheer us,

Word of
consolation,
message of
salvation.

3 When the
storms are o'er us,
and dark clouds
before us,
then its light
directeth,
and our way
protecteth.

4 Who can tell the
pleasure,
who recount the
treasure,
by Thy Word
imparted
to the simple-
hearted?
5 Word of mercy,
giving
succour to the
living;

Word of life,
supplying
comfort to the
dying.

6 O that we,
discerning
its most holy
learning,
Lord, may love
and fear Thee,
evermore be near
Thee.

November 10th

Hebrews 3 v7 – 4v13

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

That's a verse I like to quote to myself when life gets fraught. How we get to it is a bit complicated. During the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness after they had escaped from Egypt on their way to the Promised Land, the Children of Israel often lost their faith in the LORD. They complained about the lack of food & water. They made the golden calf. They worshipped false gods. They rebelled against Moses. When they were first given the opportunity to enter the Promised Land, they refused to go in. The upshot of all this was that the unbelievers didn't enter into God's rest. (It was their children who eventually made their home in Canaan.) The promise was not fulfilled for those who did not trust God. *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.* It is prefigured by the Sabbath rest. It is experienced in the peace we feel when we can *Be still and know that I am God.* It is perfected in Heaven. We are exhorted here to remain faithful, to keep God's commandments, knowing that we shall be judged by His all-seeing Word.

November 11th

Hebrews 4 v14 – 5 v14

This too is a difficult passage, Sufficient for our purposed today is to understand that Jesus our High Priest is one of us. He understands what it is to be human because He is perfectly human. He is the only human being Who has lived the perfect life. He has suffered all our temptations but He has not sinned. He therefore is the perfect priest uniting man & God. His sacrifice of Himself once for all atones for all our sins. We

may therefore *come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

November 12th

John 3 vv 1-21

This must be one of the best known chapters in the Bible. The Pharisee, a good man, wants to understand Who Jesus is & what He is doing. He has come to bring us life in all its fulness, eternal life. He has come that we may come into our inheritance as the children of God. This is a fresh start for us. This new start is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Jesus reveals Who God is and opens His Kingdom to us. Access is through faith in Him. Heaven is open to all. It is not God's purpose to condemn anyone. But human beings condemn themselves when they reject Him & choose the darkness in preference to the Light.

November 13th

John 3 vv 22-36

He must increase but I must decrease.

When Jesus began His ministry, having been baptised by His cousin John, His message was the same as that of the Baptist. *Repent, ye for the Kingdom of God is at hand.* Some of John's followers stuck with John. Some saw the two great prophets as rivals, but they were not. John came to prepare the way for Jesus Whose Kingdom would transcend anything that John or any other human being could comprehend. Jesus is the incarnation of God. Jesus proclaims the Truth, the Fulness, to which the Heavens bear witness. Like John, we (our limited mortal selves) must decrease so that our union with Christ may increase.

Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory
Till with Thee we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

November 14th

John 4 vv 1-30

What do we learn from this well-known story? Jesus gets into conversation with a Samaritan. He is not racist. He engages in debate with a woman. He is not sexist. He is not too proud to ask for what He

needs. Probably this woman was drawing water on her own in the heat of the day because the other women thought that she was no better than she should be, having had five husbands and now living with a man she is not married too. Jesus loves every one of us, just as we are.

November 15th (Trinity 23)

Philippians 3 vv17-23

Last Sunday we thought about Daniel, S, M & A and the exiles from the Holy Land living in Babylon. They were told by Jeremiah the prophet to settle there & to make their homes there & to pray for the peace of Babylon. Those like Daniel, S, M & A did just that. In fact, they rose high in Babylonian society. But they did not forget that the LORD is God. Babylon could never be their true home. The faithful exiles rejoiced when at last they were allowed to return to Jerusalem by the Persian King Cyrus.

In a way, we Christians are like those exiles in Babylon. We live in the world, but we are not of the world. We pray for the peace of the world. We seek to do our work conscientiously. By God's grace, we try to live in accordance with His Commandments even when they conflict with the values of our society. The people of God must not follow those Church leaders who *mind earthly things*, but, follow those who, like St Paul, are true to Gospel values. The promise is that, when we see Christ as He is, we shall be made like Him.

O GOD, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness; Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy Church; and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 16th

Hebrews 10 vv 1-18

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Prayer Book Morning & Evening Prayer to be said daily by clergy, ideally in the parish Church, each include words of confession. It is good to review our lives daily, twice daily even, and to consider whether or not we are living up to our Christian calling. Have we *left undone those things which we ought to have done and done those things which we ought not to have done?* Probably. We ask God's forgiveness & pray for His grace to become more the people He made us to be. We are assured that *he pardoneth & absolveth all them that truly repent and*

unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel. But these daily acts of contrition are not like the sacrifices which were offered yearly in the Jerusalem Temple on the Day of Atonement which had to be offered repeatedly because they were unable to wash away sins for ever. Only the sinless One could achieve that - Son of God & Son of Man - the true High Priest Who offered Himself as the eternally effective sacrifice. Our sins are washed away in Baptism. When we confess our sins daily or weekly or whenever, what we are doing is availing ourselves of that atonement which Christ accomplished on the Cross for the sins of the whole world.

Once, only once, and once for
all,
his precious life he gave;
before the cross in faith we fall,
and own it strong to save.

"One offering, single and
complete,"
with lips and hearts we say;
but what he never can repeat
he shows forth day by day.

For as the priest of Aaron's line
within the holiest stood,
and sprinkled all the mercy
shrine
with sacrificial blood;

So he, who once atonement
wrought,
our Priest of endless power,
presents himself for those he

bought
in that dark noontide hour.

His manhood pleads where now
it lives
on heaven's eternal throne,
and where in mystic rite he
gives
its presence to his own.

And so we show thy death, O
Lord,
till thou again appear,
and feel, when we approach thy
board,
we have an altar here.

All glory to the Father be,
all glory to the Son,
all glory, Holy Ghost, to thee,
while endless ages run

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November 17th

Hebrews 10 vv 19-39

These readings are rather long & there is so much in them. I'm focusing on v25, the assembling of ourselves together. This would be for the Holy Communion, the Breaking of Bread. As in the penultimate verse of the hymn above, participating in the Eucharist, we proclaim what Jesus has done for us, we experience its present reality, and enjoy a foretaste of what God has laid up for those who love Him.

November 18th

John 6 vv 1-21

It is I; be not afraid.

It's nearly Passover time. The Jews are thinking about how God kept them safe from the angel of death by the blood of the Passover Lamb, how they ate unleavened bread on Passover night, how God set them free from slavery, brought them through the waters of the Red Sea and fed them with manna, what they called the Bread of Heaven, in the wilderness. They also remembered God's promise that He would raise up another prophet like Moses to declare the Word of God.

In Jesus, we have the prophesied prophet infinitely greater than Moses Who is the Word of God. By His Blood, we are spared death. He sets us free from slavery to sin. He nourishes us with Himself the Bread of Life. Through the waters of Baptism, we commence our pilgrimage to the Promised Land - a royal priesthood - led, protected & guided by the fiery pillar, the Holy Spirit (Who came in tongues of flame on the apostles), the law of God not engraved on tablets of stone, but inscribed in our hearts. He Who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush as *I am* is with us in all the storms of life. *It is ;, be not afraid.*

November 19th

Psalm 96

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

That's a lovely sentence. We are surrounded by so much beauty on earth. *And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.* While the world is marred by human sin, it still bears the stamp of its Creator. God is holy. God is beauty. God is truth. *Ye shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy.* In order to worship in the beauty of holiness, we must be holy like Him. Psalm 24: *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord : or who shall rise up in his holy place? Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart :* We are made holy because we are washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb. We come to worship truly repentant of our sins. Our worship can never be adequate, but we offer the best of which we are capable. In our public worship & our private prayer, in the preaching & teaching of the Church, in the every days lives of ordinary Christians, the glory of God is proclaimed to the world. There is nothing worthy of worship. Everything we might worship is an idol and ultimately profitless, self-destructive even. God

is no thing. He is the Creator & Lord of all things. The nations, the universe, have reason to rejoice, because our God is just & true.

November 20th

Isaiah 3 vv 1-12

Take a piece of newspaper & try to tear it in a straight line. If you tear with the grain of the paper, it is not too difficult. If you tear across the grain, it is impossible. Likewise chiselling wood. With the grain, you can make an object of beauty & utility. Across the grain, you make a mess of the wood, you don't do the chisel any good & you risk cutting yourself.

Likewise with the way you live your life. Likewise with the way a nation is ordered. Likewise how human beings seek to run the world. Work with the Creator, align your will to His Will, follow His commandments, things work out. Cross God. Cut across His Will. Go against His commandments and the individual, the nation, the world itself will suffer the consequences of which Isaiah was sent to warn Judah & Jerusalem.

November 21st

Isaiah 5 vv 1-17

What has God done for us? What has God done for me? What has God done for you? Without God, we should not exist. We have nothing which God has not made. God sent His Son to die for our sins. God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ought not God be able to expect our gratitude, our faithfulness, our obedience? What should we expect if, in spite of all this, we are grateful, unfaithful & disobedient?

November 22nd (Last Sunday after Trinity)

Jeremiah 23 vv 5-8

In yesterday's reading, the prophet Isaiah reminded the people that God had done so much for them: delivered them from slavery in Egypt, led them through the Wilderness, given them the land of Canaan, blessed them, looked after them and cared for them, given them His holy Law & sent them the prophets. He warned them what would happen if they disregarded God and lived as if these things were not so. They did continue to disregard God and to disobey His holy Law. The consequence was that the city of Jerusalem & its Temple were

destroyed by the Babylonians and the leading citizens were exiled in Babylon.

In today's reading, the prophet Jeremiah promises them that God will once again redeem His people. They will be brought home from Babylon as their forefathers were brought up out of Egypt. This second deliverance will be led by a King, a Son of David, Whose Name will be THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

We read these words the week before Advent knowing that there is a third deliverance, one which fulfils the Law and the Prophets, an infinite & eternal deliverance, a deliverance not only for Israel, but for all nations, a deliverance effected by One Who was not only *made of the seed of David according to the flesh*; [but was] *declared to be the Son of God* (Romans 1^{3&4}).

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 23rd

Isaiah 8 v18 – 9v7

Behold I and the children whom the LORD hath given me.

Isaiah and his family were signs of the Word of God (as I suppose all of us should be). In Hebrews 2¹³ in the New Testament, these words are understood as indicating the essential unity of our Saviour Jesus Christ with the human race. Isaiah prophesies to those who have gone over to the dark side. Jesus is the Light of the World, John 3: ¹⁹ *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* ²⁰ *For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.* ²¹ *But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.* Witchcraft, necromancy, the worship of false gods, the love of money, obsession with power, greed. Selfishness. Violence, sexual immorality, prejudice, indifference to the needs of others – darkness. But, unto us a Child is born. John 1: ⁴ *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

⁵ *And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

November 24th

Psalm 117

This is the shortest of all the psalms. God is to be praised by all nations and people. He is to be praised for His merciful kindness & for His truth – both of which are everlasting. We who know Him, praise Him. As we praise Him, we exhort all people to join us – to know the truth of God, to experience His loving-kindness. Pray for missionaries & evangelists. Pray for grace to exhibit the mercy & truth of God in your own life.

1 Thou, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight;
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel-day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light.

2 Thou, who didst come to
bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
O now to all mankind
let there be light.

3 Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight;
move on the water's face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light.

4 Holy and blessèd Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might;
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the earth far and wide
let there be light.

November 25th

James 4 vv 1-17

God loves us as we are. We are saved by His grace, not on account of our own goodness. We receive His grace by faith, which is in itself a gift of God's grace. That being so, some people might think that it doesn't matter how they live or what sort of people they are so long as they believe in God. But the devils believe in God.

Faith does not set us free to sin. It sets us free from sin. Faith & repentance are inseparable. Baptised into Christ's Body, the Church, is a transformation. We are dead to sin. We are alive to God in Jesus Christ. As God's grace works within us, we are transformed into the likeness of Christ, the Son of God Who is love. Co-operate with God's grace, says James. Aspire to what God wants for your life. Trust Him. Pray. Live as Christians. *Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.*

November 26th

Psalm 119 vv 105-112

Just as 117 is the shortest psalm, 119 is the longest. It celebrates God's Law. The Law does not make us good. Jesus makes us good. The Law is not a tedious study with an examination at the end of it. The Law sets the standard. The Law guides us. The Law sustains us. The Law convicts us of sin. The Law is no longer, if it ever was, an external thing, a burden to carry. Through faith in Christ, through faith in God, we internalise the Law. The Summary of the Law is love. Justified by grace through faith, we are set free to live in accordance with God's Law. As we resist the devil & draw near to God, it becomes natural for us to live by God's perfect Law of Love.

If we are on a journey through the darkness, a lantern will help us to find our way. It will help us not to stumble. If we are travelling in a group, it will help to keep the group together. A light will reveal danger. A light will show us the best way. Fire frightens off wild beasts. We shall know in which direction to proceed if there is a light at our final destination. *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear; the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid* (Psalm 27¹).

November 27th

John 10 vv 22-42

How would you convince someone of the Truth of Jesus? You might tell them the story of the mighty things which He did while on earth. You might draw their attention to His sublime teaching. You could talk about His love in dying for us on the Cross. Our Saxon forebears were deeply affected by Jesus the self-sacrificing hero, the Man Who courageously faced an extremely painful death in obedience to His Father and on behalf of His brothers. You could point to the witness of John the Baptist. If they were open to the Bible's teaching, you might draw their attention to the prophecies concerning Jesus in the Old Testament. You could talk about His effect on the apostles. Those ordinary guys, after His Resurrection, were transformed by His Spirit. As the generations have gone by, so has God's Church grown by the power & grace of the Holy Spirit. Hopefully, our own lives are a witness to the Truth of the Gospel. But all this is of no avail unless God Himself opens their hearts. Witness begins in prayer.

November 28th

John 11 vv 1-16

If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

Wherever we are going, whatever hopes we have, whatever challenges & dangers we may face, we must walk in the Light, walk with Jesus.

Miracles are not available on order. We pray to God & He hears our prayers. He gives us what is good for us – usually by natural means. We don't give God orders. We bring Him what matters most to us in faith.

Jesus knows what's what. He knows what has happened to Lazarus. He knows what He is going to do. We can trust God. He knows everything about us.

The disciples were afraid of what awaited in Judaea. Fearful or not, we just have to get on with doing God's work. He knows what He is doing. He knows all about us and our fears and our needs.

The disciples don't understand what Jesus means. They think that Lazarus is enjoying health-giving repose. But they follow Jesus. We often don't understand what's happening in our lives, but it's always the best plan to follow Jesus. One day, His purposes will be revealed to us.

What do you think Thomas meant? Was he being cynical? *We might just as well die now.* Or was he being brave & faithful? *If our calling is to die with Jesus, we will willingly.*

November 29th (Advent Sunday)

John 11 vv 17-46

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

How often have I preceded a coffin into Church proclaiming those words? They are our *sure and certain hope*. Martha & Mary would both rather that their brother had not died. Jesus could have worked a miracle. Doctors could have saved him. The healing properties of Lazarus' own body could have cured him. God works by all means to save – natural & supernatural, miraculous & mundane. So why didn't He save Lazarus? I guess that most of the families who followed their loved one's coffins into Church would have preferred that they had remained longer on this earth. And yet it wouldn't be possible for all of us to live for ever on earth. But it is our *sure & certain hope* that there is something better laid up for all who love Him.

November 30th (St Andrew)

Matthew 4 vv 18-22

Andrew & Simon already knew something of Jesus. They had been followers of John the Baptist, who was the great forerunner. John had told his followers to be ready for the One Who would come after him, bearing witness that Jesus is the Son of God. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus, the Lamb of God, to Andrew & Andrew fetched Simon. Jesus prophesied the special role that Simon Peter would take in Christ's Church. In some ways, Andrew was the first missionary. In today's Gospel, Jesus calls Andrew & Simon and John & James to join Him in His task. They could not possibly know what it would entail, but they followed Him. In that, they are our examples. We all have a place in God's plan. Our calling is to follow Jesus in faith.

ALMIGHTY God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

December 1st

I Peter 3v8 – 4 v7

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer.
We're into Advent – the time of getting ready, getting ready for Christmas, getting ready for the end of Time when Jesus shall come again to judge the living & the dead. How would we want Him to find us? Obviously, living already as what we are – citizens of heaven, living in harmony with one another, leading good, honest, industrious lives, not afraid to stand up for what is right, prepared to share our faith with others who do not yet know Jesus, knowing that Jesus died for us & descended into hell (where He brought the Good News, another chance, even to those who had already perished), rose from the dead & now reigns in Heaven. Our calling is to live here on earth as children of the resurrection in anticipation of eternal life with Him in Heaven.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Where I am, there shall also my servant be.

Andrew, the missionary again together with Philip as in chapter 1, brings these Greek inquirers to Jesus. Jesus speaks of the necessity of death and resurrection – of death to sin, the world & the devil & new life in Him, also of His physical death by Crucifixion & His Resurrection & that of Christian martyrs. We are walking with Him in the way, the way of the Cross, which alone leads to eternal life with Him in Heaven. God bears witness to Jesus. Jesus bears witness to God, as all Christians are called to do. Jesus is the Light by Whom we find our Way. He is the end, the purpose of our journey. It is good that some of the chief rulers believed, but sad that they were too concerned for their own position to confess the faith. The words of Jesus judge us because they are the standard by which we are measured. The remedy is repentance & faith.

I read recently the suggestion that the BCP Confession at Holy Communion almost overdoes it. The suggestion was perhaps that we're not that abject, but we are. We must utterly repent of our sins. We are helpless in our own strength. But God in Christ has done all things necessary for us. Think about these words.

YE that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort; and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees.

ALMIGHTY God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, judge of all men; We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word, and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, And are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, Forgive us all

that is past; And grant that we may ever hereafter Serve and please thee In newness of life, To the honour and glory of thy Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A **LMIGHTY** God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him.

C **OME** unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. *St. Matth. xi. 28.*

So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. *St. John iii. 16*

Hear also what Saint Paul saith.

This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. *1 Tim. i. 15.*

Hear also what Saint John saith.

If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins. *1 St. John ii. 1.*

My only reservation is that we can't all do this *meekly kneeling upon our knees*, but I don't suppose God minds so long as our hearts are right.

December 3rd

Psalm 16

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say Rejoice.

Life in the Spirit, life in Christ, life in God. Living in faith. Trusting in God. Recognising that God alone is worthy of worship, that Christ is sufficient for us. Knowing that devoting one's life to anything less than God is futile. Thankful & joyful for what God has done for each of us. Trusting God not only for this life, but for the life hereafter.

December 4th

II Peter 1 vv 1-21

Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

I am still embarrassed when I think about how I complicated this passage when I was asked to lead a Bible Study for the Mothers Union when I was a young curate. Yes, there is a lot which is hard to understand, impossible probably while we are still on earth, but its message is very simple. God has made us His children in Christ. We are His family. We partake of His nature. So we need to live, to grow and to mature as God's children. The way to do that is to live by faith & love. God gives us grace to do this (eg through prayer, the Bible, Holy Communion, Christian fellowship). It is God Who will bring us home if we follow in the way of Jesus. The first generation of Christians like Peter haven't lived for ever on earth, but their testimony of God the Father & Jesus the beloved Son is passed down through the generations. We have received this testimony. It is our duty to pass it on. *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

December 5th

Isaiah 28 vv 1-13

The Church used to be very into the temperance movement. Drunkenness can be a serious issue, wrecking the lives of individuals and families, leading to accidents, abuse & violence, a waste of money & valuable resources, confusing the judgment of those who drink too much. Other drugs than alcohol may be even more destructive. Why do people turn to drink & drugs? One reason is the same as what leads people to excessive materialism, fear of missing out, greed. Human beings can never be truly fulfilled except in relationship with our heavenly Father. The devil has many ways of persuading us otherwise – that happiness can truly be found in what is less than God, but the devil is the father of lies. St Augustine of Hippo: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee"

December 6th (Advent 2)

Romans 15 vv 4-13

Today has been traditionally kept as Bible Sunday. As we read & meditate on the Word of God, we find hope. This world is the creation of God. He upholds the whole of Creation. He cares for it. Under His providence there will be a glorious consummation. We, each one of us, are part of that providential plan. He created us. He redeemed us. He

upholds us with His Spirit. By His grace we shall share in that glorious final consummation.

Christian anti-Semitism is a blot on our history. The Scriptures are clear. God's promises to Jews and Gentiles alike are fulfilled in Christ Jesus. We are brothers and sisters, Jews & Gentiles, in His Church. We are all one in Christ.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy & peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

December 7th

I John 1 vv 1-10

Have you ever wondered what it must have been like to know Jesus in the flesh? Well John did meet Jesus face to face. He was in His company for three years, hearing His teaching, seeing His miracles. John was a witness to our Lord's Crucifixion, Resurrection & Ascension. He was an apostle & evangelist. Having miraculously escaped a martyr's death, he provided a home for the Blessed Virgin Mary till she departed this life. What a privilege,

John experienced fellowship with the Father & the Son. If we have faith, we enjoy that same fellowship. We are one with one another in the communion of saints. We are one with the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit in the unity of the Trinity which encompasses the Church of which we by grace are members.

John shares the Gospel that our joy may be full. We share the Gospel with others that they too may share in this joy.

As Christians, we walk in the Light of Christ. All of us sometimes err, but there is always forgiveness if we return to Him.

December 8th

Isaiah 31 vv 1-9

The people of God, the Israelites, were under assault from the Assyrians – a powerful & cruel people. This had happened to them because they had disregarded the LORD. They had worshipped false gods. They had oppressed the poor. They thought that their best hope for deliverance from the Assyrians was to form an alliance with Egypt, the rival great power. Egypt was not a reliable ally, however. Their best hope, their only hope, was to return to the LORD. Chuck out the idols. Treat one another fairly. There is no other true security but in faith in God & in obedience to His Commandments, whether in eighth century BC Israel or twenty first century AD Britain.

December 9th

John 17 vv 1-17

This is my favourite chapter in the Bible. I used to read it with my confirmation classes just before they were to be confirmed. At His Last Supper, on the night before His Death, Jesus consecrates Himself as both priest and sacrifice. In knowledge of Him there is eternal life. He consecrates those who are His, all those who have believed in Him. He ascends to Heaven. We are in the world, though not of it. We are in God's keeping. We have the Holy Spirit. The Church is one, holy, catholic & apostolic, because we are united in the love of Christ, in being loved by Him, in loving Him, and in loving one another. We are holy because we are sanctified by God's truth, we are cleansed of our sins. We are catholic because He is in us and we are in Him & we are members one of another. We are apostolic because God sends us into the world as He sent Jesus, that the world might know Who Jesus is. All those who come to know Him are incorporated into the one, holy, catholic & apostolic Church and have eternal life. We have eternal life and we shall be with Him and see His glory. When that happens, we shall be perfected in His likeness (I John 3²).

December 10th

Isaiah 40 vv 1-11

The prophecies that an unrepentant Israel would fall to the Babylonians, of course, came to pass. *The wages of sin is death*. But God does not give up on us. Good news. The LORD will bring His people home. He will be their Shepherd. Much more wonderfully, Jesus, heralded by John the Baptist will redeem people of all nations.

December 11th

Isaiah 40 vv 12-31

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

The person who makes an idol uses his skills a goldsmith or a carpenter to make his god. He may worship this god. He may pray to this god. Yet it is his own handiwork fashioned out the materials which came to hand. He carves his god out of a log of wood and burns what's left over to keep warm & cook his dinner. You'd think he'd realise that he was a fool. The idol can't help him. Worshipping something you've made yourself is absurd. On the other hand, the idol won't make any demands on him. It won't issue commandments. It won't judge. Sure, it can't help, but it can't punish either. The man has made a god in his own image. It goes some way to satisfying the need which is deep within all of us – to worship something. Twenty first century Brits are not mostly idol worshippers, but it is very tempting to put our trust in the work of our own hands, in wealth, in our skills & what we can achieve ourselves. We may not feel the need to be grateful to God, to obey His commandments, to love & fear Him. But ultimately we can only depend on Him Who made all things, including us. Psalm 135

14. For the Lord will avenge his people : and be gracious unto his servants.

15. As for the images of the heathen, they are but silver and gold : the work of men's hands.

16. They have mouths, and speak not : eyes have they, but they see not.

17. They have ears, and yet they hear not : neither is there any breath in their mouths.

18. They that make them are like unto them : and so are all they that put their trust in them.

December 12th

Psalm 67

This psalm may be used instead of the Nunc Dimittis at Evening Prayer. It describes a virtuous circle. We pray for God's blessing on us. As He blesses us, so we glorify Him. As we bless God for His justice and mercy, we testify to people of all nations that God is good & worthy of all worship. As we glorify God in our praises, our testimony & our obedience to His law, our purposes align with His purposes & the world runs as it ought to run.

December 13th (Advent 3)

I Corinthians 4 vv 1-5

People can be very harsh in their judgment of Christian ministers. Maybe they think we can take it. Maybe they're dissatisfied with the world or the Church in general or with their own personal lives. They know we will try very hard not to retaliate. Ministers can be very hard on themselves, feeling that they are never good enough & somehow always responsible for any problems in the Church or in the lives of those for whom they have a pastoral responsibility. But it's God Who is our Judge. We ought not to judge one another. Neither ought we to condemn ourselves. God is our Judge & God is merciful.

O LORD Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end.
Amen.

December 14th

Psalms 71

Forsake me not, O God, in mine old age, when I am gray-headed: until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power unto all them that are yet for to come.
Old age can get us down. We're not as strong as we once were. Ill health may cause pain & limit what we can do. Problems seem harder to solve than when we are young. We may feel that we are no longer respected. Yet, we're still God's children. We can still bring everything to Him in prayer. We can look back over all His faithfulness to us in our lives. We can look forward to the good things which God has prepared for those who love Him. And we still have a vital task – to pass on what we know of God to the coming generation.

December 15th

Isaiah 46 vv 1-13

The Babylonians had wonderfully impressive processions when their idols were carried through the streets at their festivals. Probably there would have been music & singing, maybe dancing, vast crowds. But pity the poor beasts & the men who bore the weight of these massive idols. Our God doesn't need to be carried. He supports us throughout our lives, even into old age. His Word is true. He does redeem His people. *I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour.*

December 16th

John 21 vv 1-25

After the tremendous events of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection & Christ's commissioning His Church to complete His work on earth, this last chapter of John's Gospel seems mundane. The apostles go back to their old life, fishing. Jesus makes Himself known to them in their ordinary lives. And after a shared breakfast with Jesus, Peter is given the opportunity to confess the sin of denying Jesus, receives forgiveness and is given a tremendously important job. Jesus has plans for John too, as He has for all of us. For most of us, it is in ordinary daily lives that Jesus meets us, blesses us richly & appoints us our tasks.

December 17th

Revelation 1 vv 1-20

The Revelation of St John the Divine is a fascinating book. There is much in it which is hard to understand. There are horrific descriptions of what happens on account of human rebellion against God. There are passages of sublime beauty. God gave John this revelation when he was an exile on the Isle of Patmos for his faith. In this first chapter, we are shown something of the glory of God, the wondrous beauty of the Trinity. We are shown the divine nature of Christ, one with the Father & the Holy Spirit (the sevenfold Spirit of God). We are shown His exalted manhood in heaven. We see Him too as the faithful witness, the first martyr, Who died our human death. We meet Him as the resurrected Saviour. We look forward to His Second Coming. We are reminded of our own status as kings & priests in His kingdom, His Church. We see His care for each of His Churches, ours today as well as the seven Churches of ancient Asia Minor.

December 18th

Psalms 90

This is a great psalm about the almightiness & providence of God. He is in charge of the whole Creation. He is in charge of our lives. He gives us the gift of life. He gives us everything we have. He is our judge. We must account to Him for what we do with our lives. He is our merciful judge. We look to Him for the gift of wisdom to live out our mortal turn on earth & to attain to our eternal home.

O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. *Amen.*

December 19th

Revelation 4 vv 1-11

As mere mortals, we cannot imagine Heaven. In the Bible, some people are blessed with a vision of that tiny aspect of heaven which it is possible for human beings to begin to comprehend. John was granted such an experience which is described here. This vision incorporates aspects of visions vouchsafed to other holy people earlier in the Bible story. The 24 elders are generally believed to represent the 12 patriarchs from whom the 12 tribes of Israel take their names & the 12 apostles. The seven Spirits of God are the sevenfold Holy Spirit. The 4 beasts are often taken to be the evangelists: Matthew the man, Mark the lion, Luke the ox & John the eagle. They can be seen simply as cherubim. They reflect the nature of Christ and the Christian virtues. Maybe this glimpse of heaven will aid our minds when we join in in the Eucharistic Prayer: **THEREFORE** with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen. Or when we sing the Te Deum: **WE** praise thee, O God : we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee : the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud : the Heavens, and all the Powers therein. To thee Cherubin and Seraphin : continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy : Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty : of thy glory. The glorious company of the Apostles : praise thee. The goodly fellowship of the Prophets : praise thee. The noble army of Martyrs : praise thee. The holy Church throughout all the world : doth acknowledge thee; The Father : of an infinite Majesty; Thine honourable, true : and only Son; Also the Holy Ghost : the Comforter. Go on. Read chapter 5.

December 20th (Advent 4)

Philippians 4 vv 4-7

Rest in God. Be thankful. Rejoice. We can't always be happy. We'd be quite shallow people if we were. But joy is God's gift to us in Christ. Rest in the depths of His love. In Him, there is peace. So we try by His grace to behave calmly & wisely, trusting Him, acting lovingly. The Lord is close to us. Lean on Him. Be ready to meet Him in daily life & at the end of time. Bring everything which is on your mind to

Him in prayer, not forgetting to be thankful for everything which He has already done for you & His care for you today. Rest in His peace. **O LORD**, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end.
Amen.

December 21st (St Thomas)

Isaiah 35 vv 1-10

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

Knees do get weak as we get older! Thomas couldn't believe in the Resurrection of Jesus. He was too matter of fact. He needed to see for himself. Christ gave him what he needed. Thomas responded, *My Lord & my God*. Jesus spoke of the blessing there is not only for the apostles who saw, but also for all *that have not seen, and yet have believed*. Psalm 34⁸: *O taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is.*

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reprov'd. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

December 22nd

Isaiah 55 vv 1-13

Nothing can satisfy us except the knowledge of God. He invites us to draw near to Him and to enter into His covenant which is open to all in great David's greater Son. *I shall be your God & you will be my people*. This is good news for all the nations of the earth, good news which it is our business to share. First it was revealed to the Israelites. In Christ it is revealed to all nations. Seek the LORD while we have opportunity. Let us repent of our sins. God's Word, when God speaks, His Word written in the Bible, His Word made flesh in Jesus, accomplishes His purposes. Just as the Children of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt & brought to the Promised Land, just as those who were exiled in Babylon returned to Jerusalem, so shall the redeemed of the LORD out of every nation come joyfully to the new Jerusalem.

December 23rd

Psalm 115

Not unto us, O lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give the praise. It is worth thinking soberly about where (Whom, rather) all good things come from. It puts us in our place. It inspires us to be thankful. It assures us that we are cared for. It teaches us to look after what God has given us – from personal shelter & food & clothes to the earth itself.

There is no point in relying on anything less than God. Only God can save us. Yes, He gives us health & strength, the things we need to live, resources such as gold & silver, minerals, clever people who can design & build things, but we can't trust any of these created things in itself. We can only make use of them in the context that they are God's gift to us. Nothing created is worthy of worship. It is folly to give ourselves to anything less than God.

God has given the earth to the children of men. We have a responsibility for the material world.

Mortals die, but we have the gift of eternal life to praise Him forever.

December 24th

Isaiah 60 vv 1-22

I used sometimes to take my dog up into the fields above St Michael's before the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, I would think of the shepherds in those fields above Bethlehem as I looked down on the homes of Cuxton. The night is dark but the Light is coming very soon. Psalm 30⁵: *Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.* It's been quite a year, one way or another. It isn't difficult sometimes to feel overwhelmed by it all. At the time of Isaiah's prophecy, the Israelites were going through dark times. But, through the prophet, God assures them of the coming dawn. The immediate fulfilment would have been in the events of the Middle East hundreds of years before Christ. God's decisive intervention in human history would be with the Birth of Jesus. In Him, the prophecies would be fully fulfilled. The victory over sin, the world & the devil would be effected in the life, death & resurrection of the Word made flesh. We live in this reality. The glories of God's Kingdom are at hand. We await the final consummation in His return to earth at the end of time.

Christmas Day

Luke 2 vv 1-14

The Christmas stories are wonderful, wonderful beyond our comprehension. The Virgin Mother bares her Child & lays Him in a manger – a helpless babe. This birth of this Child is great joy to the shepherds – simple folk like all of us – and to all people. This Birth is of such significance that it is announced by angels, so glorious that is accompanied by a celestial hymn of praise. The Light shines in the darkness, a human newborn in a dark stable, the heavenly Son of God. **ALMIGHTY** God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

26th December (St Stephen)

7 vv 55-60

The authorities in Jerusalem objected to Stephen's preaching the Gospel. Arraigned before the high priest & the council, Stephen took them on a tour of the Old Testament, demonstrating that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's purposes, to which the Law & the Prophets bear witness. His hearers were furious at Stephen's challenge to their position & power. They were *cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth*. Supported by the Holy Spirit, Stephen saw the heavens open, the Babe of Bethlehem restored to His place as Son of Man standing at God's Right Hand. Gazing on Jesus, Stephen was transformed into His likeness, *changed from glory into glory*, so that, like Jesus on the Cross, he had the grace to pray for his murderers.

Grant, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may stedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*

27th December (St John the Evangelist)

Exodus 33 vv 9-23

Moses was very privileged by the closeness of his relationship to God. God had given him an enormous task to bring the Children of Israel up

out of Egypt to the Promised Land. They were a fickle people, often ungrateful, faithless, rebellious, disobedient, trying the patience even of God. They were after all only human! Moses needed to know that God would support him in this tremendous work. Of course, God always supports us in the tasks we undertake in His Name, but Moses wanted something more to see God. But God is holy that no-one may see His face, *for there shall no man see me & live*. Moses therefore enjoyed only a partial vision. But God does make Himself fully known in Jesus, the Human Face of God. *Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know as I am known.* (I Corinthians 13¹²).

MERCIFUL Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

28th December (Holy Innocents)

Matthew 2 vv 13-18

Terrible things have happened in human history. Terrible things happen in the world today. We can't pretend that evil doesn't exist. We can't gloss over it. We can repent of our own sins. We can seek, by God's grace, to play our own part in making this world a better place. The Child Jesus was spared the Bethlehem massacre. 33 years later, He would die for the sins of the whole world. He is present in the world today, sharing the pains of those who suffer - through His Church proclaiming the Word of God, calling sinners to repent of their disobedience to God's Commandments, warning of judgment on those who spurn God's mercy, consoling those who are suffering.

The following hymn used to be very popular and then fell out of favour. I have never chosen it for a service and have only sung it once in Church. A child had tragically died. The parents, who were not regular churchgoers, looked through the hymn book for a suitable hymn for the funeral. This was the one they chose. It is comforting.

There's a Friend for little
children
Above the bright blue sky,
A Friend who never changes,

Whose love will never die;
Our earthly friends may fail us,
And change with changing
years,

This Friend is always worthy
Of that dear Name He bears.

There's a rest for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
Who love the blessed Saviour,
And to the Father cry
A rest from every turmoil,
From sin and sorrow free,
Where every little pilgrim
Shall rest eternally.

There's a home for little
children
Above the bright blue sky,
Where Jesus reigns in glory,
A home of peace and joy
No home on earth is like it,
Nor can with it compare;
For everyone is happy
Nor could be happier there.

There's a crown for little
children
Above the bright blue sky,

And all who look for Jesus
Shall wear it by and by;
A crown of brightest glory,
Which He will then bestow
On those who found his favour
And loved His Name below.

There's a song for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
A song that will not weary,
Though sung continually;
A song which even angels
Can never, never sing
They know not Christ as
Saviour,
But worship Him as King.

There's a robe for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
And a harp of sweetest music,
And palms of victory.
All, all above is treasured,
And found in Christ alone:
Lord, grant Thy little children,
To know Thee as their own.

ALMIGHTY God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

December 29th

Revelation 19 vv 1-10

The Book of Revelation is about judgment and redemption. There is a great deal of wickedness in the world. God is the Father of us all. It angers Him to see His children suffer, sometimes terribly, at the hands of their brothers & sisters. The earth cries out for justice & God is a righteous Judge. Yet God is the Father of the wicked as well as of the innocent. It grieves Him to punish His evil children. Confronted with what they deserve, even the wicked would cry out for mercy and God is a merciful God. In reality, of course, we are all a mixture of innocence

and evil. We are all both perpetrators of wrong-doing and its victims. We cry out for justice; we cry out for mercy. Justice and mercy are two sides of the same coin & that coin is love.

In the Book of Revelation, we are shown something of the glory of Heaven & something of the torments, the punishments of the world consequent on human rebellion against God. None of us is worthy of Heaven. Separated from God by sin, there is only one alternative.

It is through the Death of the Lamb of God that the matter is resolved. Jesus takes on Himself the sins of the world & their consequence (death) & effects our Atonement with God so that we may enjoy the eternal life which is His free gift to all who come to Him in faith.

Heaven may be regarded as the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Church (we Christians) is the bride of Christ. The rejoicing is unending. Holy Communion is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. At the Lamb's high feast we

sing
praise to our victorious King,
who hath washed us in the tide
flowing from his pierced side;
praise we him, whose love
divine
gives his sacred Blood for wine,
gives his Body for the feast,
Christ the victim, Christ the
priest.

Where the Paschal blood is
poured,
death's dark angel sheathes his
sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go
through the wave that drowns
the foe.
Praise we Christ, whose blood
was shed,
Paschal victim, Paschal bread;
with sincerity and love
eat we manna from above.

Mighty victim from on high,
hell's fierce powers beneath
thee lie;
thou hast conquered in the
fight,
thou hast brought us life and
light:
now no more can death appal,
now no more the grave enthrall;
thou hast opened paradise,
and in thee thy saints shall
rise.

Easter triumph, Easter joy,
sin alone can this destroy;
from sin's power do thou set
free
souls newborn, O Lord, in thee.
Hymns of glory and of praise,
Risen Lord, to thee we raise;
Holy Father, praise to thee,
with the Spirit, ever be.

December 30th

The Church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation,
by water and the word:
from heaven he came and
sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought
her,
and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation,
one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy Name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with every grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder
men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed;

Today's Bible passage shows something of what will be, the Last Judgment and what follows. Our life as Christians – as citizens of Heaven here on earth – is a foretaste of & a witness to what is to come at the last. This hymn declares where we are as it longs for where we shall be.

December 31st

The Book of Psalms concludes with praise. As we read this psalm, we end this year with praise. Praise is the end of our lives in both senses of the word *end*. Praise is both our life's purpose & its completion.

If we have faith in God, praise will be our eternal occupation.

Revelation 21 vv 1-14

yet saints their watch are
keeping,
their cry goes up, "How long?"
and soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war
she waits the consummation
of peace for evermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blessed,
and the great Church
victorious
shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union
with God, the Three in one,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee

Psalm 150