



17th January 2021 2nd Sunday of Epiphany



The Gathering

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

The Greeting

We meet in the presence of God
who knows our needs,
hears our cries,
feels our pain,
and heals our wounds.

Song: All hail the power of Jesus' name

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1k9w_1pXtM

Prayers of Penitence

By the mercies of God,
let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to him,
which is our spiritual worship.

Lord Jesus, illuminate the darkness in our hearts:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to your saving love:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, unstop our ears to hear your living word:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

May God who loved the world so much
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive *us our* sins
and make *us* holy to serve him in the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Collect

Eternal Lord,
our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation
to your glory, hidden through past ages
and made known
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

1 Samuel 3

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

¹⁷ “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

¹⁹ The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

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

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-18

¹ You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts,^[a] God!
How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand –
when I awake, I am still with you.

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

Rev. 5:1-10

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?’ ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See,

the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:

'You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.'

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

Song: Will you come and follow me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAYM8pWCwWk>

Gospel Reading

Alleluia, alleluia.
We have seen his star at its rising,
and have come to pay him homage.

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

John 1:43-end

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.'

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'

⁴⁶ 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.

'Come and see,' said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.'

⁴⁸ 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.'

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.'

⁵⁰ Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.' ⁵¹ He then added, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Last week, Ian was talking about Jesus' baptism.
There were three things he said which I see reflected in this week's readings, too.

Ian talked about glimpsing into heaven:
 heaven was torn open, as Jesus came up out of the water.

He reminded us that God speaks.
At creation, God spoke into the formless and empty world.
God said: "Let there be light". And there was light.
Ian talked about God's voice.
The Psalm last week described God's voice, shaking the desert.
And, when Jesus was baptised,
God spoke, to his beloved Son.
"You are my Son, whom I love."
And that word of love is for us, too.

Thirdly, Ian talked of our being invited to join in God's song.
And that God calls us to join in the song.

Each of those has a parallel in this week's readings.
Today we see:

1) A glimpse of heaven.
Jesus promises Nathanael that he will see heaven opened.
Jesus talks about angels ascending and descending,
 like Jacob saw when he was running away from Esau,
 back in the book of Genesis.
And, in Revelation, we see John's vision of heaven, with Jesus surrounded by angels.
Jesus appears as the Lamb of God, triumphant.

2) God speaks.
He spoke to Samuel, in the temple.
Jesus spoke to Nathanael.
And, in the book of Revelation, Jesus spoke directly to John;
 though we don't hear Jesus himself in today's verses.

3) There is the song of heaven.
The Psalms are God's songbook for us, of course.
But, in Revelation, we hear more of heaven's song – the wonderful song of praise.
Worshipping Jesus, the one who has won the victory.
Jesus is **worthy** – because he has purchased us by his blood.
Jesus died, to make us part of his kingdom, his family.
"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
 to receive power and wealth
 and wisdom and strength
 and honour and glory and praise!"

Why am I making these links between last week and this week?
They are just examples of how God's word has a consistent message.
It fits together.
The more we delve into it, the more we find that one bit sheds light on another.

Read your Bibles, my friends!
As the old Prayer Book Collect says,
 "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the holy Scriptures.
St Paul tells us the Scriptures are "able to make us wise for salvation
 through faith in Christ Jesus."

Read your Bibles!
We are to digest them, make them part of ourselves.
God's word will nourish us.
As Jesus said to Satan, "Man does not live by bread alone
 but by every word that comes from the mouth of God".
Read God's word, devour it – till it becomes part of you!

But, specifically, what are our Bible readings saying to us, this morning?
I want to start with Samuel.
We join the story when he is still only a lad.
He is the junior assistant, in the Temple.
He is working under old man Eli, the high priest.

And, one night, they have gone to sleep in the Temple.
During the night, Samuel **hears** God's voice, calling him.
He thinks it is Eli, so he runs to see what Eli wants.
But it isn't Eli calling, it is God himself.

Samuel wasn't expecting to hear God speaking.
We are told that God's word was rare – or precious.
Not many folk were used to hearing God's voice.
Even Eli, the priest, took a while to cotton on.
But God speaks – and eventually Samuel is ready to listen.

I was going to say that this was the start of Samuel's journey with God.
After this incident, Samuel became known, through the whole country.
He was recognised as a prophet of the Lord.
This event in the temple was the beginning of that ministry.

But I don't think Samuel's journey with God started **then**.
Surely, it started much earlier.
I'm sure it began with his mother, Hannah.
She was a woman of prayer.
Do read all about her, in the two previous chapters.
How she must have prayed over her son!
Samuel must have learned a lot, from such a godly mother.
Praying for our children, for our grandchildren if we have them – God will **use** those prayers.

So God speaks: he spoke to young Samuel.
Don't despise the youth of today – God can call them just as much as anyone else.

Mind you, don't think God **only** calls young people.

Remember – when God called Abraham to up sticks and move to the land of Canaan, Abraham was 75.

And when God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses was 80.

God speaks, he calls.

Then we come to Philip & Nathanael.

Jesus calls Philip.

And Philip recognises that Jesus is the Messiah.

So he goes to get Nathanael.

Philip says Jesus is from Nazareth.

But Nathanael takes some persuading.

“Can anything good come from **Nazareth?**”

Nathanael isn't expecting to hear from God.

Especially, not expecting a Messiah from Nazareth.

But good things **can** come from Nazareth, as Nathanael discovers.

Jesus makes a wonderful promise.

Not just to Nathanael – but to all his disciples.

We will see the heaven opened.

And we will see something like Jacob saw, when God appeared to him at Bethel.

But it won't be a **ladder**, from earth to heaven, with angels on it.

The angels will be ascending and descending, on Jesus himself.

Because Jesus will be the bridge between earth & heaven.

As Ian said last week, Heaven is open to us.

Later in his Gospel, John tells us that Jesus is the way – the way to the Father.

See how it all fits together!

But we need to look, too, at the passage from Revelation.

John's wonderful vision looks forward,

to when Jesus is revealed in glory.

Revelation is a puzzling book.

Just in these few verses, Jesus is described as a Lion – and as a Lamb.

And that scroll, with seven seals – it has writing all over it;

but we are not told what the writing is.

So don't expect me to have all the answers!

But this passage shows Jesus' mighty power.

He is the only person, in the whole of earth & heaven,

who can open the seals on that scroll.

And why?

Because he has conquered.

Jesus is the victor, over all that is evil.

Because he gave himself up to death.

He was put to death, for us, for the whole world.

Jesus' death has paid the price, to ransom us, to ransom **everyone**, from the power of sin.

Jesus' death has bought the way for us to have a relationship with God.

He has created that bridge, between earth and heaven.

Some folk won't accept that, of course.

Some people don't want to know.

They choose to stay outside.

Jesus doesn't force anyone into his kingdom.

But, for all who receive him, we become part of his kingdom.

And that is the wonderful good news that we have, as Christians.
Jesus has won that victory.

So first the 24 elders sing his praises.
“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
people from every tribe and language and people and nation.”
And then myriads of angels add their voices:
“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!”, they sing.

Then **everyone** joins in.
Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea:
they are all singing:
“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

This is a song for everyone to sing, for **us** to sing.
God calls us to sing – the song of his redeemed people!
Singing God’s praises – how can we do better than that?

Because we have a wonderful God.
We have a God who is mightier than anyone, mightier than anything in the whole world.
We have a God who sees us, who understands us, just as he understood Samuel.
He knew the Psalmist inside out.
He understood David’s inmost thoughts.
Nothing was hidden.
Jesus knew what was in Nathanael’s heart, even before they met.
And he knows our hearts, too.
So he knows how rubbish we are.

But, in his mercy, he overlooks all that.
Because he has ransomed us.
He loves each of us, deeply, passionately.
He looks past all our faults, all our wrongdoing.
And we are precious to him.
The Lamb who was slain has bought us, for God.

This is our wonderful God.

Just now, of course, we can’t sing in church.
We can’t even meet outdoors to sing.
But there is nothing that says we can’t sing at home.
Don’t worry too much about the neighbours.
Don’t worry if you haven’t got much of a voice.
Sing God’s praises, sing his glory!

To God be the glory, great things he has done!
Amen.

Timothy.

Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray that Christ may be seen in the life of the Church.

You have called us into the family
of those who are the children of God.
May our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ
be strengthened by your grace.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be a temple
where the Holy Spirit can dwell.
Give us clean hands and pure hearts
so that our lives will reflect your holiness.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be a light to the world,
so that those in darkness come to you.
May our lives shine as a witness
to the saving grace you have given for all.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be members of your body,
so that when one suffers, all suffer together.
We ask for your comfort and healing power
to bring hope to those in distress.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be the Bride,
where you, Lord, are the Bridegroom.
Prepare us for the wedding feast,
where we will be united with you for ever.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

Jesus, Lord of the Church,
you have called us into fellowship with all your saints.
We unite our prayers with theirs
and ask for grace to serve you with joy
where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for all eternity.
Amen.

The Peace

Christ is our peace.
If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.
The old has passed away: behold, everything has become new.

May the peace of the Lord be always with us and all those we love.

Song: Here I am send me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ELqpkldCgY>

An act of Spiritual Communion

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.

Lord, in these days of mercy,
make us quiet and prayerful;
in these days of challenge,

make us stronger in you;
in these days of emptiness,
take possession of us;
in these days of waiting,
open our hearts to the mystery of your cross.

Song: Called by Christ to be disciples

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXQSh2iTj2I>

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water
welling up to eternal life,
perfect in you the image of his glory;
and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

The Dismissal

To God the Father, who loved us,
and made us accepted in the Beloved:
to God the Son, who loved us,
and loosed us from our sins by his own blood:
to God the Holy Spirit,
who spreads the love of God abroad in our hearts:
to the one true God be all love and all glory
for time and for eternity.

Amen.