The Third Sunday before Advent
8th November 2026



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

The Greeting

Grace, mercy, and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Prayer of Preparation

Faithful Lord,
You have spoken to us through the scriptures
revealing your redeeming love for creation.
Your mercy has no end.
Grant us the grace to trust you
and to receive the gifts of your love,
new every morning,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

HYMN

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does its successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on His love with sweetest song,
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on His name.

Blessings abound where'er He reigns:
The prisoners leap to lose their chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all who suffer want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring
The highest honours to our King,
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud amen.

Invitation to confession

Let us confess to God the sins and shortcomings of the world;
its pride, its selfishness, its greed;
its evil distortions and hatreds.
Let us confess our share in what is wrong,
and our failure to seek and establish that peace
which God wills for all his children.

Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Absolution

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

The Collect

Almighty Father,
whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all:
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,
and bring the families of the nations,
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,
to be subject to his just and gentle rule;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

First reading from scripture
Amos 5 18-24

The Day of the Lord

18 Woe to you who long
for the day of the Lord!
Why do you long for the day of the Lord?
That day will be darkness, not light.
19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion
only to meet a bear,
as though he entered his house
and rested his hand on the wall
only to have a snake bite him.
20 Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light—
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

21 “I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
your assemblies are a stench to me.
22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.
23 Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
24 But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 70

1 Hasten, O God, to save me;
come quickly, Lord, to help me.
2 May those who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.
3 May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!”



turn back because of their shame.
4 But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
“The Lord is great!”
5 But as for me, I am poor and needy;
come quickly to me, O God.
You are my help and my deliverer;
Lord, do not delay.

Second reading from scripture
1 Thess. 4. 13-end

Believers Who Have Died

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not
grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we
believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord’s word, we
tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who
have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of
the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still
alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be
with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

HYMN

When all thy mercies, O my God,
my rising soul surveys,
transported with the view, I'm lost
in wonder, love and praise.

Unnumbered comforts to my soul
thy tender care bestowed,
before my infant heart conceived
from whom those comforts flowed.

When in the slippery paths of youth
with heedless steps I ran,
thine arm unseen conveyed me safe,
and led me up to man.

When worn with sickness, oft hast thou
with health renewed my face;
and, when in sins and sorrows sunk,
revived my soul with grace.

Through every period of my life
thy goodness I'll pursue
and after death, in distant worlds,
the glorious theme renew.

Through all eternity to thee
a joyful song I'll raise;
for, oh, eternity's too short
to utter all thy praise!

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.
Stay awake, praying at all times
for the strength to stand with confidence before the Son of man.
Alleluia.

The Gospel

The holy Gospel is written in the 25th Chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew beginning at the 1st verse.
Glory be to thee, O Lord

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

25 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." 9 But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." 12 But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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

Reflection

This rather strange story of the ten bridesmaids is, of course, a parable. A story with a meaning. Jesus was a master at using images and stories to make his teaching come alive. He would take an everyday subject and move from its natural application to a spiritual one. It would arrest the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and leave the mind in sufficient doubt as to its precise application to tease it into active thought.

Parables are designed to make one point and we must take care not to push the illustration beyond that point. All the vivid dramatic detail in this parable is intended only to emphasise the folly of unpreparedness and the wisdom of preparedness.

The thought of having ten bridesmaids would send a shiver down the spine of the father of the bride today but then it was the custom that the bridesmaids would wait with the bride until the bridegroom came to fetch her to his home or the place where the wedding feast was to take place. It seems that there was some fun in this in that the bridegroom would try and catch them out; catch them unprepared, they never knew when he would come so they had to be watchful and ready. Fortunately, to give them a bit of warning a cry would go out – 'He is coming – come out and meet him!' Then I suppose it was all a flurry of fun and confusion as still happens at weddings today.

Jesus uses this parable along with several others to answer a question his disciples had put to him. Jesus had been talking with them about the end times and now they ask, "Tell us when is this going to happen, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the world?"

His reply takes two chapters in Matthew's gospel and includes eight parables all of which build on each other. It starts with one man, Noah and ends with the nations of the world and third from the end is

the story of the bridesmaids. Each of the parables makes a different point but when taken together they tell three things; that the exact time is known only to God, that how we live our lives now matters; and that the end involves some form of separation and judgement. All of which makes this a difficult and challenging section of the gospel and maybe that is why it has been placed as the last teaching Jesus gives before his arrest and death.

'The kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens', does not mean that the kingdom is like the bridesmaids but that the situation at the last judgement will be like the situation in which these maidens found themselves, some ready for it some not ready.

The detail that they all slumbered and slept is very unlike any wedding I can imagine whatever the hour and since all the girls do it, no blame attaches to it in the story but only the negligence of those who failed to provide themselves with oil. It seems that the main function of this parable is to focus on the great cry at midnight which awakens the sleepers. There is no time now, for the bridegroom is here!

The point of this parable might be this, that we must make wise use of our time. We cannot 'borrow' neither depend on another's faith nor risk deferring our own efforts until it is too late. It's a relationship which deepens with time. The challenge of this parable is to ask ourselves how prepared we are spiritually; do we take time to build up our relationship with God so that we have more than 'just enough'. Like the similar story of the two-house builders, have we dug down deep and built on the rock so that when life 'happens' and the storms go over us we still stand if a bit battered.

The point of Jesus' parable is to warn us to be awake and alert and not to 'sleepwalk' through life. And this is something only we can do for ourselves, and it takes time, effort and persistence. We need to develop our relationship with God so that we have more than 'just enough'. The wise bridesmaids made sure they had reserves to light them through to darkness to the wedding feast. The wise bridesmaids enter into the joy of the wedding feast and that is a picture of what is set before us today – an anticipatory picture of great joy of the heavenly banquet to which we have all been invited.

How we act now is an expression of our call to be faithful to God who is coming with righteous judgement. There are consequences for our actions now and for the future. Our response is the first step, the setting out on this pilgrimage of faith. Eugene Peterson, who wrote 'The Message' bible, entitled his autobiography *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction.* We just need to keep responding to that sense of being drawn towards light and life, to allow ourselves to be caught up in the mysterious otherness of God.

The Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary

and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Intercessions

We pray for the coming of God's kingdom.

Father, you sent your Son to bring good news to the poor,
sight to the blind,
freedom to captives
and salvation to your people.
Help us who have been changed by this good news.
to open our eyes and our thinking
that we may be alert to recognise the good works
you have prepared for us to walk in.
Help us to recognise situations and people as places and relationships
we are placed within, as your plan for our lives.
Rouse us to work as followers of Jesus.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to bring help to the poor
and freedom to the oppressed
and make that more than just words.
We are each poor and oppressed by simply being who we are,
and living as best we can, so we meet that in one another.
And then there is 'the other', whom we will never meet
but we can help, out of our abundance.
Release our tight hold on 'stuff', money and time,
bring us into the freedom of generosity.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to tell the world
the good news of your healing love.
Free us from fear of what others think of us,
or that we are not able to tell people about you for all sorts of reasons.
Jesus told us to just be witnesses

and a witness just tells what they know.
Prevent us from 'sleepwalking' through our lives.
but to understand we have a purpose,
a task that you have assigned to us and not to another.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to those who mourn,
to bring joy and gladness instead of grief.
As you have comforted us, so may we comfort others,
by kind and constant friendship,
helping each other bear the difficulties of life.
We pray for those who are sad and despairing, as we can often be.
Those who miss someone who has died, as we miss our own.
Those who give themselves to care for others and are exhausted and overwhelmed.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

What is this kingdom? It's both now and not yet.
Here like hidden treasure and here as a blazing hope before us.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.
In the body of your people, the church
In the world so desperate for peace
And in our own lives that we may be changed and healed
Father hear our prayer,
and make us one in mind and heart
to serve you in Christ our Lord. Amen.

These and all the silent prayers of our hearts we offer to you.
Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ
our lord. Amen

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.

God of peace,
whose Son Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom
and restored the broken to wholeness of life:
look with compassion on the anguish of the world,
and by your healing power make whole both people and nations;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

We pray for God's blessing

God the Father,
By whose glory Christ was raised from the dead
Strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life.
And the blessing of
God who created you
Jesus the Christ who saves you
And the Spirit who is within you
Be with you and with all for whom you pray
Now and always Amen

HYMN

Thy kingdom come, O God!
Thy rule, O Christ begin!
Break with thine iron rod
the tyrannies of sin!

Where is thy reign of peace,
and purity and love?
When shall all hatred cease,
as in the realms above?

When comes the promised time
that war shall be no more,
oppression, lust, and crime
shall flee thy face before?

We pray thee, Lord, arise,
and come in thy great might;
revive our longing eyes,
which languish for thy sight.

Men scorn thy sacred Name,
and wolves devour thy fold;
by many deeds of shame
we learn that love grows cold.

O' lands both near and far
thick darkness broodeth yet:
arise, O Morning Star,
arise, and never set!

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