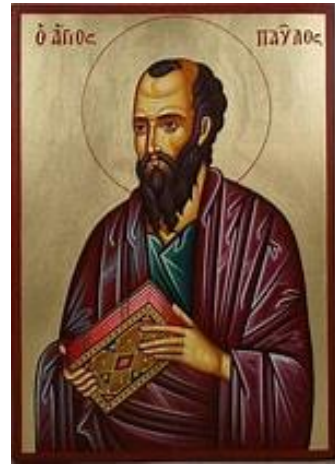


The Third Sunday of Epiphany
25th January 2026
The conversion of Paul



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

HYMN

Bethlehem, of noblest cities
None can once with thee compare:
Thou alone the Lord from heaven
Didst for us Incarnate bear.

Fairer than the sun at morning
Was the star that told his birth
To the lands their God announcing,
Seen in fleshly form on earth.

By its lambent beauty guided,
See, the Eastern Kings appear
See them bend, their gifts to offer—
Gifts of incense, gold and myrrh

Solemn things of mystic meaning—
Incense doth the God disclose:
Gold a Royal child proclaimeth:
Myrrh a future tomb foreshows

Holy Jesu, in thy brightness
To the Gentile world displayed
With the Father and the Spirit
Endless praise to thee be paid

Introduction to confession

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.

You awaken us to new life by the Spirit:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
You bring pardon and peace to our troubled hearts:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
You make us one people in the fullness of yourself:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

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

The Collect for the Conversion of St Paul

Almighty God,
Who caused the light of the gospel
to shine throughout the world
through the preaching of your servant Saint Paul;
grant that we who celebrate his wonderful conversion
may follow him in bearing witness to your truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

Collect for the third Sunday of Epiphany

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

First scripture reading Acts 9. 1-22

Saul's Conversion

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face shine on us—^[b]
² so that your ways may be known on earth,
your salvation among all nations.

³ May the peoples praise you, God;
may all the peoples praise you.
⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you rule the peoples with equity
and guide the nations of the earth.
⁵ May the peoples praise you, God;
may all the peoples praise you.

⁶ The land yields its harvest;
God, our God, blesses us.
⁷ May God bless us still,
so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.



Second scripture reading Galatians 1. 11-16a

Paul Called by God

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

HYMN

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless sea;
Day by day his sweet voice sounding,
Saying, "Christian, follow me."

In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these

Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."

Jesus calls us—By your mercies,
Savior, may we hear your call,
Give our hearts to your obedience,
Serve and love you best of all.

The Gospel

Alleluia, alleluia.

Christ was revealed in flesh, proclaimed among the nations
and believed in throughout the world. (1Tim 3.16)

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew 19. 27-end
Glory be to thee O Lord

²⁷ Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" ²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

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

Reflection

How do we come to know Christ?

Both the gospels and the epistles make it clear that the natural life we inherit from our parents can never inherit eternal life. There has to be another 'birth', not a natural one, but a spiritual one, a spiritual awakening that opens to us a whole different understanding of our world and the purposes of God within it. Jesus speaks of this. A man, Nicodemus, came to him. He was well versed in the Jewish religion and prominent within that. Yet for all this he saw something in Jesus' words and actions that he could not explain. He was a seeker after truth and not closed and settled in his understanding but willing to be taught. Jesus repeats the same response to Nicodemus' questions, without any explanation about how to work this out. "*You must be born again to see, to enter the kingdom of God.*" A natural "*How?*" comes from Nicodemus.

Jesus likens this to the wind, you do not know where it comes from or where it is going but you see it rustle the leaves, feel it on our face, see the is power. We don't see it but see what it does. So is this birth of the spirit; we cannot explain process any more than we can catch the wind. There is much mystery the process of natural birth but even more mystery in the process of spiritual birth. But Jesus teaches this is what must happen.

The whole conversation is, in fact, a teaching about the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives. No wonder Nicodemus had to 'think this through'. No one can give birth to themselves. So how does this happen. Natural birth from conception is about nine months. Like the wind which we cannot see, there is very little to see for some time, but just like the effects of the wind, in time the new life is obvious.

All of us understands wind and its effects. We are aware of its presence – in a similar way, using this illustration, Jesus clues us into how the Spirit works in our lives. A soft breeze of gradual awareness to which we can respond which can catch us up into that relationship with God which becomes, in the words of Paul Tillich, ‘our ultimate concern’, ‘our magnificent obsession’.

John in his gospel puts it this way, “...as many as believed and received him were born of God.” Not only believe, but a conscious responding, however tentative. There is an act of appropriation. This ‘knowing’, this ‘birthing’ into life, which is a relational experience of the divine, is everywhere presented as a gift. But we have to respond to receive, it is never thrust upon us. In the ‘new birth’ we come to know Christ as our Lord and Saviour. It is the beginning of our knowledge of him.

Perhaps the above can sound a ‘bit too much’ and with it a sense that we would lose ourselves if we were to take it as seriously as Mr Tillich. In truth, the opposite is true; we discover and become more ourselves. We find a relationship closer than any we can experience on a human level.

“If you love me you will obey me and I will be with you and will be in you.” Perhaps that can feel like a ‘take over’, but it is actually a freedom. Freedom from so much that lurks in the dark recesses of life. *“I have come to set the prisoner free, to give sight to the blind and set at liberty those who are bound”.* This is spiritual as much as literal.

We see this exemplified in the life of St Paul. Paul never knew Jesus during his time on earth. In his writing he never refers to the earthly life of Jesus; he recounts no miracles, no exorcisms. Unlike Peter and the others he cannot say – “Oh do you remember when Jesus raised the son of that poor widow when we were on our way to Nain,” or “Do you remember when he stilled the storm, fed the crowd.” Rather he experienced the remarkable ‘Damascus road’ experience from persecutor of Christians to the greatest apologist of the good news of the gospel. But this did not come out of ‘thin air’ (to push the analogy). Like Nicodemus, Paul had been aware of a drawing, a seeking after God. The Damascus road was a very dramatic ‘birth’.

Only God could effect that sort of change and Paul understands this a God’s plan for him. And most surprisingly of all he is not to be sent to the Jews with whom he could have argued so easily but to those outside, to the Gentiles. Something which would have been unthinkable to him before he met Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

Paul does not start straight away. His whole life has undergone a complete turn around and all values are upside down. For three years he stays in Arabia. He has to process what has happened to him - to work through these extraordinary events and to face himself and God. To become sure of himself and to be sure of God.

We are like Paul; we have no first-hand knowledge of Jesus in his life or physical resurrection. But we can come to know Christ also. Like any relationship it must begin. At the outset we do not know how would it continue, what shape might it take? Time is the key, as is purposeful attention. A relationship that is nurtured will grow.

I remember a preacher saying, "You can have as much of life lived in God as you want, how much do you want?" To state the obvious, to the degree that we give time to study scripture, prayer, silence and the with other Christians, is pretty much the measure of how we will grow. To revert back to the idea of birth, all the time before birth the child is maintained by the life of the mother. Once born, and given time, the child must learn to maintain itself.

Thomas Merton describes time given, scripture studied, prayer and silence, as acts of worship in which we present ourselves before God. He writes: 'Religious silence is silence that is undertaken as an act of worship. Whether I hear God or not makes no difference.'

In today's collect we pray 'renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your mighty power. Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit will help us know him. May that be our prayer.

Jesus said: *"This is eternal life, that you may know me and the one who sent me."*

The Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Intercessions

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.
Bless those who serve with courage and strength and
those who lead with wisdom
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.
We pray for those who have died recently
committing them into your loving care
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.

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.

Almighty Father,
whose Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world:
may your people, illumined by your word and sacraments,
shine with the radiance of his glory,
that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed
to the ends of the earth;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever. Amen

May God the Father,
who led the wise men by the shining of a star
to find the Christ, the Light from light,
lead you also in your pilgrimage to find the Lord.
Amen.

May God the Son,
who turned water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana,
transform your lives and make glad your hearts.
Amen.

May God the Holy Spirit,
who came upon the beloved Son
at his baptism in the river Jordan, pour out his gifts on you
who have come to the waters of new birth.
Amen.

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

HYMN

1. Lord Jesus Christ
You have come to us
You are one with us
Mary's son
Cleansing our souls from all their sin
Pouring Your love and goodness in
Jesus, our love for You we sing
Living Lord

2. Lord Jesus Christ
Now and every day
Teach us how to pray
Son of God
You have commanded us to do
This in remembrance, Lord, of You
Into our lives Your power breaks through
Living Lord

3. Lord Jesus Christ
You have come to us
Born as one of us
Mary's son
Led out to die on Calvary
Risen from death to set us free
Living Lord Jesus, help us see
You are Lord

4. Lord Jesus Christ
I would come to You
Live my life for You
Son of God
All Your commands I know are true
Your many gifts will make me new
Into my life Your power breaks through
Living Lord