

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

He has clothed me in the garments of salvation. *First Reading*

His mercy is from age to age. *Psalm*

God has called you and he will not fail you. *Second Reading*

'Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God that you do with love.' *St Therese of Lisieux*

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
ever faithful to your promises and ever close to your Church:
the earth rejoices in hope of the Saviour's coming,
and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time.

Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness
that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope
which his presence will bestow
for he is Lord for ever and ever.

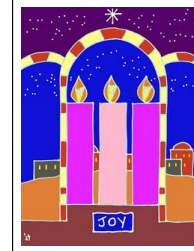
Old Opening Prayer

This week's texts if you'd like to reflect further:
Isa. 61: 1-2, 10-11; Luke 1: 46-50, 53, 54, 1 Thess. 5: 16-24; John 1: 6-8, 19-28



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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM



Third Sunday of Advent, 'Gaudete' Sunday
Year B, 17th December 2023

'Rejoice!
The Lord is near.'

The readings on this *Gaudete* ('Rejoice!') Sunday are full of encouragement, resonating with joyful hope as we draw closer to the birthday of Jesus: God's Son coming to live amongst us. Isaiah, Mary, and John the Baptist all bear joyful witness to what God has done and will do for his people.

Isaiah (**First Reading**) announces the coming of the anointed one: a cause for rejoicing. He will bring freedom, healing and good news to the people. Images of clothing bodies and growing seeds celebrate God's activity in the world and in our lives.

Mary's Magnificat is a joyful song of praise to God, her Saviour who is rich in mercy. (**Psalm**)

St Paul (**Second Reading**) encourages us to be guided by the Holy Spirit in all that we do; we are to give thanks for all things to God, and to pray constantly. Paul urges us to be happy always, because Christ is faithful to his promise and will not fail us.

The focus of the **Gospel** is John the Baptist, who bears witness, testifying to the true identity of 'the light': Jesus himself. John answers the priests' questions about his own identity and ministry, then announces that the Saviour they seek, Jesus, is already amongst them, though 'unknown to them'.

As we continue preparing for Christmas, we rejoice that Jesus is already in our hearts and lives. Let's pray to receive the graces needed to announce his message and presence through our attitudes, actions and words.



Opening Prayer

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation
and to celebrate them always
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.

First Reading Isaiah 61: 1–2; 10–11

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.

‘I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in the cloak of integrity, like a bridegroom wearing his wreath, like a bride adorned in her jewels. For as the earth makes fresh things grow, as a garden makes seeds spring up, so will the Lord make both integrity and praise spring up in the sight of the nations.’

As Christmas draws closer, I may be busy preparing. But whatever time I have, I settle gently into prayer. Perhaps I focus on an Advent candle or something else that brings a sense of watching, of light shining in the darkness.

I try to let any chatter occupying my mind slow down. I place any concerns into the Lord’s caring hands, and turn my attention towards him, aware of his loving presence in and around me.

When ready, I read the passage from Isaiah several times. I pause at any word, phrase or image that stands out for me, taking as much time as I need to mull it over. Why is it important to me?

‘The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me.’

Jesus chose these same words from Isaiah to explain his calling to the people when he spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth.

How are these words speaking to me right now? Perhaps I think of all that is going on in the world: homelessness, refugees, poverty, war, injustice, oppression, the environmental crisis ...

How do I respond?

Maybe there is something I need liberating from myself ... anxiety, sorrow, hurt, disappointment, fear, low self-esteem ...?

Perhaps I ponder *‘a year of favour from the Lord’*: an opportunity for renewal, to make a fresh start.

Whatever may arise, I speak from my heart to Jesus about it, just as I would to a dear friend.

As I slowly bring my prayer to a close, I may like to echo Isaiah’s words with a sense of gratitude:

‘I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God.’

Gospel John 1: 6–8.19–28

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’, he declared quite openly, ‘I am not the Christ.’ ‘Well then,’ they asked, ‘are you Elijah?’ ‘I am not’, he said. ‘Are you the Prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ So they said to him, ‘Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?’ So John said, ‘I am, as Isaiah prophesised: a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord.’

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him. ‘Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah and not the prophet?’ John replied, ‘I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal strap’. This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

Taking as much time as I need, I become still: there is no rush. The Lord is near, though I may not always recognise it. I ask for an open heart and mind.

In time I read the Gospel slowly, staying with any word or phrase that resonates, letting it soak in. I might like to re-read the opening paragraph and replace John’s name with my own.

How am I bearing witness to Jesus, reflecting his light to others? Maybe this is in simple acts of kindness, by sharing my time, my gifts and resources ...?

I ask the Lord to shed his light on any area of my own life that feels to be in darkness.

Perhaps I now picture myself in the scene as a bystander. I notice expressions on faces; the tone of the voices. I watch as John responds to the priests’ questions, telling them who he is not. I listen carefully as John says: *‘there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me’*.

Can I recognize Jesus in all the different faces and ways he comes to me each day?

I sit quietly for a while with Jesus, then thank him for being with me, for listening to me and guiding me. *Glory be ...*