

**ORDER OF SERVICE FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT – SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH
AND SHEPPARTON RURAL CONGREGATIONS (13th December 2020)**

Introit: 25 (TiS) verses 1 & 4

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of God be with you all.

And also, with you.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect of the traditional custodians of the land in which I live, work and worship. To the elders and members of the Yorta Yorta nations past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship:

Out of the depth of confusion, the messenger rings clear. Hovering over our hesitations, the messenger steps forward.

Calling us, confronting us, reminding us of the God of all goodness, pointing us towards coming grace.

Wait, wait for the signs of hope, celebrate with joy the God of love.

Our future is in the hands of God.

Hymn: 147 (TiS) 'To God be the glory'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

We thank you this day, O God, for all who have had the courage and charisma to bring your Gospel afresh to people down the years.

We thank you for those who live among us, in this time, who hold the word high in new ways, inviting faith, inviting new vitality for your work.

Thank you, O God, that you never give up on us or any generation.

O God, we know that we often need recalling to your life. We sometimes live from decisions long made, from vivid experiences of your love which have lost their passion in the ordinary days of our time.

Often, O God, we have reduced your life in us to our own hesitations and weaknesses, rather than springing forth in the energy of the gospel and the wonder of our salvation.

Thank you, O God, that you never give up on us or any generation.

Sometimes a new light from you surprises us and we reject it because we have a limited vision of what you can do or think that the one who brings it isn't worthy.

Forgive us, O God of surprises. Forgive us, when we push away your messengers, or turn our backs on your gifts of a new life.

Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

God is bringing us home, calling us towards the wonder of Christmas and the gift of grace and peace.

We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Doxology: 772 (TiS) 'Worship, honour, glory, blessing'.

Advent 3 Liturgy:

Reader: We wait for the coming of Christ, giving life in abundance.

All: **Come, giver of Life.**

(The first three candles are lit)

Reader: The desert shall REJOICE and blossom abundantly. REJOICE and be glad in it.

All: **Come, Giver of Life.**

Reader: Do not be afraid: see, I am bringing you good news of great JOY for all people.

All: **Christ, shine in our world today.**

All sing:

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirsts.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

Shared until all are fed.

Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Readings: Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11; John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Message: 'The gospel witness'.

We hear from our reading of Isaiah 61 that Israel is in mourning. But their grief is not because they are in captivity rather mourning their failure to rebuild the city and their temple to its former glory.

Furthermore, they mourn the injustices of both their religious and political practices. They wept because of the disparity between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless.

It is not what they had expected. They expected a full restoration of a righteous community as proclaimed by the prophets and hoped for by those who returned from exile. For example, in chapter 60.

In our reading, chapter 61 the prophet is speaking in the first person singular “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for all who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastation of many generations...

Transforming the former devastations will require more than a memory of the past and a promise to build. It will require the people of Jerusalem adopt, like God, a love of justice and a hatred of robbery and wrongdoing (v. 8)

A new future is possible because God promises to be in “everlasting covenant with them” (v. 8) and because God has provided the appropriate work clothes: garments of salvation and robes of righteousness (verses 9 – 10).

The city where hopelessness had taken root will, by God’s spirit and by God’s blessing, sprout righteousness and praise.

The chief priests and the Levites in our New Testament reading were familiar with these promises. When they heard the message of John the Baptist, they asked him, “Who are you?”, “Are you Elijah?”, “Are you the prophet?” Why are you baptising?”

Here, John made sure they understand him, and not only who he is but also what he is about.

“He is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord”. He speaks the truth, but he is not the truth. He is enlightened but he is not the light. He is the voice crying out in the wilderness, but he is not the WORD of God.

John’s is the voice of hope. His words ring out through the wilderness of our world and our lives. Proclaiming the One who is to come whom he is not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.

John distinguish himself from the One who is coming, I baptise you with water but the One who is coming will baptise with the Holy Spirit.

The One, who is to come, will show favour to the lowly, offers mercy, and lends the strength of his arm. He will fill the hungry with good things and comes to help of his people.

Isaiah listened to the voice of God to bind up the broken hearted, bring good news to the oppressed, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.

John listened to the voice of God, "This is my Son, whom I am well pleased".

But whose voice are we listening to? Are we called to be witnesses of Him who is coming? Are we advocating justice and peace? What about the lowly, the hungry, the dispossessed and the homeless?

Could it be, that we are called to be the voice of hope for the hopeless, to bring the light of Christ to those who are in the dark?

We are witnesses to the greatest story ever told. It is our story. It is God's story.

Amen.

Hymn: 270 (TiS) 'On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry'.

Notices and Concerns:

Offering:

Prayers of the People:

O God, for whom we wait and long, we bring to you our prayers for your world and for your church.

Promise of righteousness, come.

Fed the hungry, shelter the homeless and hear the cries of all who plead for justice.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Promise of freedom, come.

Bring good news of release to the oppressed, free those in chains of misery and despair.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Promise of peace, come.

Heal ancient feuds and hatreds and deliver your people from the horrors of war.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Promise of forgiveness, come.

Look with mercy on our wrongdoings and help us to turn from our sinful ways.

Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Promise of salvation, come.

Remember your people, according to your steadfast promises, and send your Messiah.
Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Promise of love, come.
Hold in your tender embrace all who are lonely, friendless, forgotten, rejected.
Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Promise of comfort, come.
Bring the balm of your presence to all who know pain, anguish, sorrow or grief.
Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Promise of hope, come.
Let us see that the time of your coming is near and keep us watchful for your return.
Come, O God for whom we wait, and, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Promise of glory, come.
Draw your saints, in this world and the next, into the light of your eternal presence.
Come, O God for whom we wait and long, and, in your mercy,
hear our prayer. (LUP J. Nelson)

Hymn: 268 (TiS) 'Joy to the world!'

Blessing:

May the loving God, well of joy, quench your every thirst.
May the loving Christ, author of salvation, write you into love.
May the loving Spirit, breath of gentleness, inspire kindness in you and all that you do.

Amen.

778 (TiS) 'Shalom to you now'.