



Call to worship

Let us hear the cry from the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Let us come to the welcoming love of God. Let us worship with joy and expectation.

Hymn StF 166 Christmas is coming

*Christmas Is Coming
The Church Is Glad To Sing
And Let The Advent Candles
Brightly Burn In A Ring.*

The First Is For God's Promise
To Put The Wrong Things Right,
And Bring To Earth's Darkness
The Hope Of Love And Light.

The Second Is For The Prophet
Who Said That Christ Would Come.

Watch on YouTube <https://youtu.be/RR6WTX-WMO0?si=kkFix9Xdicai1L8I>

With Good News For Many
And Angry Words For Some.

The Third Is For The Baptist,
Who Cried 'Prepare The Way,
Be Ready For Jesus,
Both Now And Every Day'

The Fourth Is For The Virgin,
Who Mothered God's Own Son,
And Sang How God's Justice
Was Meant For Everyone.

At Last We Light The Candle,
Kept New For Christmas Day,
This Shines Bright For Jesus,
New Born, And Here To Stay.

Christ Is Among Us
The Candles In A Ring
Remind Us That Our Savior
Will Light Up Everything.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Listening God, your ears are never closed, and you hear the beats of our hearts and the music of our lives.

Lord, we praise you for hearing us, and we turn to you.

Seeking God, your search is beyond all limitations. You see our paths and our true desires.

Lord, we praise you for seeking us, and we turn to you.

Finding God, your grace meets us where we are, lifting us when we fall, welcoming us when we return.

Lord, we praise you for finding us, and we turn to you.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we turn to your light, confessing that we have walked into the darkness of hatred, silence, and selfishness. We have lost the way. Lord, we turn to your love, confessing that we have denied your love and gone after the love and approval of the world. We have lost the way. Lord, we turn to your mercy, confessing that our pride has overruled the cry of our co-creatures. We have lost the way. Forgive us, Lord. Give us sight to see your way again. Help us to straighten the path of our lives so that we may receive you with humble and open hearts. Clothe us with your love and guide us with your Spirit. Amen.

Hymn StF 182 – On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry Watch on YouTube https://youtu.be/plr21lLgFpg?si=phukFFWZAdhfd_1

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh.
Awake and harken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin:
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

We hail you as our Savior, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward.

Without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
and make us rise to fall no more.
O let your face upon us shine
and fill the world with love divine.

All praise to you, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

Reading Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.' "

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptised by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptise you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Sermon

GPS has become our life companion in this modern world. Whether we travel to a new city or simply try to avoid traffic, we depend on that little voice to tell us, "Turn right," "Go straight," or "Make a U-turn." Every day, new technologies are being developed to guide our journeys.

We see in the Gospel reading of Matthew chapter 3, verses 1-12, about the preaching of John the Baptist. His core message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" When we hear the word repent, many of us imagine feeling sorry, feeling guilty, or changing our minds about something. But in the Bible, the story behind this word is much richer.

In the Greek New Testament, we read the word *metanoia* which means a change of mind. That word worked well for the early church as they welcomed Gentile believers. But Jesus and John the Baptist weren't speaking Greek when they preached. They spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. And the word they almost certainly used was *teshuvah*.

Teshuvah doesn't begin in the mind. It begins with a picture: a traveller walking in the wrong direction. Step by step, moving farther away from home, from safety, from relationships. Then, suddenly, the person stops, realises they are headed the wrong way, turns around, and begins to walk back toward God.

That is teshuvah: not just regret, not just emotion, but turning around and coming home.

Firstly, repentance begins with a turn. A turn simply means a change of direction. It means we stop for a moment, look around, and say, "Lord, I think I've been walking the wrong way. Help me to turn." We change our direction...we change our thinking... we change our heart. In simple words, we choose a different road.

And why do we need to turn? Because in life, many times, we build our own roads. We make our own paths, follow our own ideas, and end up far from where God wants us to be. Maybe some of us today realise we are on a road that is not helping us: A habit that quietly steals our peace... An attitude that hurts someone we love... A secret sin that pulls us down day after day...A fear that dictates our choices...A pride that makes the word "sorry" feel too heavy...

And into this, John the Baptist's voice echoes through the centuries: "Turn now. Don't delay. "Because the moment we turn toward God, we turn away from everything that is killing our joy. A new direction is always possible with God.

Secondly, repentance teaches us the lesson of returning. If turning is a change of direction, then returning is coming back home to God. This is where repentance becomes relational.

Turning is only the first step. But the next, deeper step is returning, that is, coming back to the One who has always loved us.

Think of the prodigal son. He returned. He walked back, step by step, to his father's house. He remembered who he truly was, a beloved son. And that is what returning means for us. It is remembering that we, too, are God's beloved children.

Many times, we turn, but we do not return. We change a few habits, we make small adjustments, but we never really come close to the Father's heart. And in this Advent season, God the Father is calling us to return home. This is the beautiful heart of repentance, not running from God, but returning to God.

Finally, repentance teaches us one more, that is the rhythm of re-turning. What is re-turn? It simply means turning again... and again... and again.

Repentance is not a one-time moment we experienced long ago. It is not something we tick off like a task. Repentance is a daily practice, a daily movement of the heart.

Think of a compass. No matter how many times you shake it, the needle always swings back to the north. In the same way, our hearts must keep swinging back to God, in the morning, in the evening, in the middle of life's confusions.

This is how spiritual fruit grows in us. John the Baptist said, "Bear fruit worthy of repentance." Fruit never appears in a single day. Fruit grows slowly, steadily, by returning again and again to sunlight, to water, to the root.

If the tree fails with the fruit, John the Baptist is saying, "The axe is at the root. The chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire." Therefore, his message is very straightforward. Turn or burn.

My dear friends, God is speaking to us today through three steps: Turn, change the direction of your life. Return, come back to God who is waiting. Re-turn, keep turning again and again every day. Amen.

Hymn StF 173 – Into the darkness of this world Watch on YouTube [https://youtu.be/xh89fzSEXbE?si= Y_wB3KAvwzeGa3y](https://youtu.be/xh89fzSEXbE?si=Y_wB3KAvwzeGa3y)

Into the darkness of this world;
Into the shadows of the night;
Into this loveless place You came,
Lightened our burdens, eased our pain
And made these hearts Your home.
Into the darkness once again,
Oh come, Lord Jesus, come

*Come with Your love
To make us whole.
Come with Your light
To lead us on.
Driving the darkness
Far from our souls.
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

Into the longing of our souls;
Into these heavy hearts of stone;
Shine on us now Your piercing light,

Order our lives and souls aright
By grace and love unknown.
Until in You our hearts unite,
Oh come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come with Your love ..

O Holy Child, Emmanuel;
Hope of the ages, God with us,
Visit again this broken place,
Till all the earth declares Your praise,
And Your great mercies own.
Now let Your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come in Your glory
Take Your place.
Jesus, the Name above all names.
We long to see You face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

Prayer of Intercession & Lord's Prayer

We pray for all who feel far away from hope today, especially those struggling with illness, loneliness, grief, or fear. Lord, help them to experience your presence in their lives and to enjoy your comfort and healing.

We pray for the ministries of your Church, both locally and across the wider world. As many have lost light and love, help your Church to remain a beacon of hope, a lamp on the hillside, shining with your compassion and truth.

We pray for our nation and for all who lead us for the growth and well-being of our people, for the policies and decisions being made, and for every revision and change that shapes our common life. Grant wisdom, justice, and a heart for the vulnerable.

We pray for our community, for our families, neighbours, friends, and those unknown to us but known deeply to you. Let your peace and love surround them in their journey of life.

We pray for ourselves, Lord. You know our needs and our desires. We bring our lives before you, help us to remain hopeful, to rejoice in you, and to keep our faith steady and strong.

We pray for this season of Christmas celebration. Let your peace surround all our homes and every place we go. We also pray for those who find this time difficult for many reasons, maybe because of loneliness, worries, sickness, finances or painful memories. May your gentle presence bring comfort, strength, and hope to them.

We bring to you, O Lord, the things we have asked and the things we have failed to ask, submitting everything at Your throne of grace. And now, as your Son and our Lord has taught us, so we pray:

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn StF 216 See him lying on a bed of straw Watch on YouTube https://youtu.be/V_kwvn8G1wE?si=5em4wX4tuBEalUuA

See him lying on a bed of straw:
a draughty stable with an open door;
Mary cradling the babe she bore
the prince of glory is his name.

*O now carry me to Bethlehem
to see the Lord of love again:
just as poor as was the stable then,
the prince of glory when he came.*

Star of silver, sweep across the skies,
show where Jesus in the manger lies;
shepherds, swiftly from your stupor rise

to see the saviour of the world!

O now carry me...

Angels, sing again the song you sang,
sing the glory of God's gracious plan;
Sing that Bethl'em's little baby can
be the saviour of us all.

O now carry me...

Mine are riches, from your poverty,
from your innocence, eternity;
mine, forgiveness by your death for me,
child of sorrow for my joy.

O now carry me...

Blessing

God the Father, who created us in love and calls us to walk in his light, bless you and keep you.

God the Son, Jesus Christ, the true Way who leads our lives toward our eternal destiny, guide your steps and strengthen your faith.

God the Holy Spirit, our comforter and helper, go before you, stay beside you, and dwell within you, each day.

And the blessing of the holy Trinity, be with you and remain with you always. Amen.