



**The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth,
Denholme**

14th December 2025

The Third Sunday of Advent

Prepared by Liz



Call to worship

It is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lights up my darkness.

Psalm 18:28

Rejoice, for the Lord is at hand.
Our God comes to us to give us his joy and peace.
To give us hope in the world,
hope in our hearts,
hope in our homes,
hope in our lives.
God, we rejoice at your coming
and pray that your kingdom comes in us today.

You may like to light three candles – one for all of God's faithful people, one for men and women of vision, and one for John the Baptist and all who immerse themselves in the love and presence of God.

The Lord comes to us.
He abides with us.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world.
Eternal light, shine in our hearts.

*On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Come, then, and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings from the King of kings!
Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
Make straight the way for God within;
Prepare we in our hearts a home,
Where such a mighty Guest may come.
For Thou art our Salvation, Lord,
Our Refuge, and our great Reward.
Without Thy grace our souls must fade
And wither like a flower decayed.
Stretch forth Thine hand, to heal our sore,
And make us rise and fall no more;
Once more upon Thy people shine,
And fill the world with love divine.
To Him Who left the throne of Heaven
To save mankind, all praise be given;
Like praise be to the Father done,
And Holy Spirit, Three in One.*

Collect

Blessed are you, Lord our God, for you sent your messenger, John the Baptist to prepare the way and make ready for your coming; grant that we may be prepared and ready to receive and welcome you into our lives and homes. As you come to us in love may we abide in your love and in your presence this day and for ever.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God forever.

First reading: Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.

No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Second reading: Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Reflection with Alison

Isaiah gives us a vivid picture this week: a dry, weary desert suddenly bursting into blossom. It's a reminder that God's renewal often begins in places that look least promising. And in our Gospel, John the Baptist, stuck in a prison cell, discouraged and unsure, asks the painfully honest question: "Are you the one...?" Jesus answers by pointing to the signs of God already at work: people healed, hope restored, lives changed.

These readings speak deeply into Advent. We wait, we watch, and we look for God's quiet signs of life in the ordinary corners of our days.

I love people-watching, and if I'm in a pub, shop or café in any of our villages, I can't help noticing how people interact, the friendly chatter in Wilsden Post Office, the laughter in the Co-op in Denholme, the banter in the butchers in Harden, or the hum of conversation in the George Hotel in Cullingworth. These are unassuming places, yet they reveal the beauty of community: people looking out for each other, sharing stories, connecting in simple, human ways. And that's the heart of Advent: noticing where God is already stirring, even in small, everyday moments. In kindness offered. In steady service. In community rebuilding itself bit by bit.

As a church, we are praying for growth, not just in numbers, but in depth, in faith, in courage, in compassion. And I am genuinely hopeful. Hopeful that the seeds we've planted will take root. Hopeful that God is preparing the ground for something new. Hopeful that we may even see a kind of revival: hearts awakened, lives renewed, our villages rediscovering the joy and comfort that the presence of Christ brings.

Advent calls us to trust that God is at work long before we see the full picture. So let's keep watching, keep tending, keep praying... and keep expecting the desert to bloom.

A creed for Advent

We believe in God,
robed in splendour,
veiled in mystery,
ruler alike of darkness and light.
We encounter God
in Jesus Christ,
who was tortured and put to death,
but whose radiance could not be quenched;
whose touch brings a blaze of colour
to a dull, drab world:
reviving the weary,
healing the wounded,
dazzling the satisfied.

We walk with God,
guided by the light of God's loving spirit,
who enters the shadowed places of our hearts
and leads us into truth and life.

We wait for God,
and the fulfilment of God's promises,
for the time when the darkness will hold no fear
and the light will no longer blind,
but creation will be made whole once more
and God's peace will reign for ever.

Amen.

Cally Brooker.

Prayers of intercession with Alison

As we continue our Advent journey, watching for the signs of God's Kingdom breaking into our world, let us pray with hope, trusting that the desert places can bloom and that Christ is near.

After each section you may respond with:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of promise,
we pray for your Church throughout the world, waiting and watching for the coming of Christ.

Strengthen tired hands and steady weak knees, especially in small congregations and scattered rural parishes.

Inspire all who preach, teach and serve that we may point, like John the Baptist, not to ourselves but to Jesus, the One who brings good news to the poor and sight to the blind.

Renew us when we grow discouraged and help us to rejoice in every sign of your Kingdom among us.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of justice and peace,
we pray for the nations of the world, longing for the day when sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Where deserts of conflict, oppression or poverty seem endless, may your life-giving waters flow.

Bless peacemakers, aid workers, governments and community leaders; give courage to those who speak truth in hard places, and soften the hearts of those who wield power carelessly.

Bring hope where hope is fragile, and light where shadows feel long.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God who walks with us on the holy way,
we pray for our villages and all who call them home.

Thank you for the community spaces, the people who volunteer, and the quiet, unseen acts of kindness that knit us together.

As Christmas approaches, open our eyes to those who feel left out, overlooked or overwhelmed.

Make our churches places of welcome, warmth and encouragement, where faith can gently grow and where belonging is offered freely, just as Christ welcomes us.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Healing Christ,
you told John's friends to look at the signs of your compassion: the blind seeing, the lame walking, the wounded restored.

We bring before you all who are struggling today, the sick, the lonely, the anxious, the grieving, and those carrying private sorrows.

(Short pause.)

May your love bring strength to the tired, comfort to the broken-hearted, and peace to those who cannot see a way forward.

Walk closely beside all who wait for results, for treatment, for answers, or simply for hope to return.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of everlasting joy,
we remember before you those we love but see no longer.

Gather them into the fullness of your Kingdom, where the ransomed return with singing, crowned with joy that never ends.

Give comfort to all who mourn this Christmastime, and hold us in the promise that nothing can separate us from your love.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

The Lords Prayer

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.

Closing Prayers

Loving God, as we give thanks for John the Baptist,
may all people know that they are immersed in your presence.
Bless all who seek to share your word,
That they may reveal that your kingdom is at hand.
Give us, O Lord, the courage to seek your will
And to strive to forward your kingdom on earth.
As your faithful people prepare for Christmas,
may they welcome you into their hearts and their homes.
Amen.

Father, you created us by your love and for your love.

May we abide in you and you in us.

Jesus, you redeemed us by your love and for your love.

May we abide in you and you in us.

Spirit of God, you guide us by your love and for your love.

May we abide in you and you in us.

Holy and blessed three, your love enfolds and surrounds us.

May we abide in you and you in us.