

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

**O people of Sion, behold,  
the Lord will come to save the nations,  
and the Lord will make the glory of his voice  
heard  
in the joy of your heart.**

**COLLECT**

Almighty and merciful God,  
may no earthly undertaking hinder those  
who set out in haste to meet your Son,  
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom  
gain us admittance to his company.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

**FIRST READING**

Is 11:1-10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse,  
a scion thrusts from his roots:  
on him the spirit of the Lord rests,  
a spirit of wisdom and insight,  
a spirit of counsel and power,  
a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the  
Lord.

(The fear of the Lord is his breath.)

He does not judge by appearances,  
he gives no verdict of hearsay,  
but judges the wretched with integrity,  
and with equity gives a verdict for the poor of  
the land.

His word is a rod that strikes the ruthless;  
his sentences bring death to the wicked.

Integrity is the loincloth round his waist,  
faithfulness the belt about his hips.

The wolf lives with the lamb,  
the panther lies down with the kid,  
calf and lion cub feed together  
with a little boy to lead them.

The cow and the bear make friends,  
their young lie down together.  
The lion eats straw like the ox.

The infant plays over the cobra's hole;  
into the viper's lair  
the young child puts his hand.  
They do no hurt, no harm,  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the country is filled with the knowledge of  
the Lord

as the waters swell the sea.  
That day, the root of Jesse  
shall stand as signal to the peoples.  
It will be sought out by the nations  
and its home will be glorious.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM**

Ps 71

Response:

**In his days justice shall flourish  
and peace till the moon fails.**

1. O God, give your judgement to the king,  
to a king's son your justice,  
that he may judge your people in justice  
and your poor in right judgement. (R.)

2. In his days justice shall flourish  
and peace till the moon fails.  
He shall rule from sea to sea,  
from the Great River to earth's bounds.  
(R.)

3. For he shall save the poor when they cry  
and the needy who are helpless.

He will have pity on the weak  
and save the lives of the poor. (R.)

4. May his name be blessed for ever  
and endure like the sun.  
Every tribe shall be blessed in him,  
all nations bless his name. (R.)

**SECOND READING**

Rm 15:4-9

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Romans.

Everything that was written long ago in the  
scriptures was meant to teach us something  
about hope from the examples scripture  
gives of how people who did not give up  
were helped by God. And may he who helps  
us when we refuse to give up, help you all  
to be tolerant with each other, following the  
example of Christ Jesus, so that united in  
mind and voice you may give glory to the  
God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It can only be to God's glory, then, for you  
to treat each other in the same friendly way  
as Christ treated you. The reason Christ  
became the servant of circumcised Jews was  
not only so that God could faithfully carry out  
the promises made to the patriarchs, it was  
also to get the pagans to give glory to God  
for his mercy, as scripture says in one place:  
For this I shall praise you among the pagans  
and sing your name.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!

**Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight,  
and all mankind shall see the salvation of  
God.**

Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Mt 3:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Matthew.

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he  
preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this  
was his message: "Repent for the kingdom of  
heaven is close at hand." This was the man  
the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

The man John wore a garment made of  
camel-hair with a leather belt round his  
waist, and his food was locusts and wild  
honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and  
the whole Jordan district made their way to  
him, and as they were baptised by him in  
the river Jordan they confessed their sins.  
But when he saw a number of Pharisees and  
Sadducees coming for baptism he said to  
them, "Brood of vipers, who warned you to  
fly from the retribution that is coming? But if  
you are repentant, produce the appropriate  
fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves,  
'We have Abraham for our father,' because, I  
tell you, God can raise children for Abraham  
from these stones. Even now the axe is laid  
to the roots of the trees, so that any tree  
which fails to produce good fruit will be cut  
down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you  
in water for repentance, but the one who  
follows me is more powerful than I am,  
and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will

baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His  
winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his  
threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the  
barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that  
will never go out."

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

**I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.**

**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,**

*(all bow during the next three lines)*

**and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers  
and offerings,  
and, since we have no merits to plead our  
cause,  
come, we pray, to our rescue  
with the protection of your mercy.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

**Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights,  
and behold the joy which comes to you from  
God.**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Replenished by the food of spiritual  
nourishment,  
we humbly beseech you, O Lord,  
that, through our partaking in this mystery,  
you may teach us to judge wisely the things  
of earth  
and hold firm to the things of heaven.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

# REPENT! – YES! YOU!

(MATT 3:1-12)

John the Baptist is a major figure in the Gospel tradition: he appears at the beginning of the four accounts of Jesus' ministry.

Matthew presents him today in the light of the biblical prophet Elijah, who was a thorn in the side of the Israelite king Ahab, an uncompromising preacher of a somewhat fundamentalist interpretation of the covenant Law. Here John is the one who prepares the people for the coming of Jesus, the one mightier than he is. John's message is urgent and clear: the day when God's power and presence will be revealed is near and time is short. He warns those who are smug and complacent in their being members of the people of Israel, children of Abraham: this is not sufficient – they must repent, literally change the way they think, adopt a new mentality. John's baptism by water is a sign of willingness to change: the baptism of the one coming after him is more powerful, and his baptism will be a cleansing one, involving the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire and wind are symbols associated with the biblical Day of the Lord, which involves judgment. As the people were baptised, they confessed their sins: this refers also to God's readiness to forgive. ■

## SAY

**Have mercy on me, God,  
in your kindness: in  
your compassion blot  
out my offence.**

(Psalm 51:1)



## REFLECT

It is a great temptation (and mistake) to read the Gospel narratives as simply historical accounts of Jesus' ministry and the events and people associated with it. They are addressed to us today as the Word of God which is alive and active. John the Baptist's message, uncomfortable as it is, is meant for us today and directly. Abraham is the most significant figure in the Hebrew Bible; to be a child of Abraham means to be a member of the chosen people, to have a share in the covenant relationship with the Lord. John the Baptist tells those who come to him from Jerusalem that this will be of no avail, that something more is required, and they must change the way they understand their religion. So it is with us: we may think that because we belong to a certain school of thought

then we are acceptable to God. We may imagine that because we follow a certain way of life suggested by a spiritual leader, then we are all sorted. Matthew is telling us through John the Baptist that we are wrong, and that we can be just as smug and complacent as the Pharisees are depicted as being. What matters in the end is the kind of person we are and how close is our relationship to God. The practices of religion are no substitute for a life of faith, and can even be a trap for us, if we are not careful. That is why we need to repent, to examine ourselves and to change anything which prevents us from allowing Jesus fully into our lives. The people who came to John the Baptist were willing to change, and in that they are an example which we would do well to follow. ■

## LEARN

*Metanoia* is the New Testament word for conversion, and is usually translated as repentance.

*Metanoia* means literally to change the way we think.

'Conversion' means to turn round, to re-orientate one's life: both terms have the sense of profound and radical change.

## DO

Make the Sign of the Cross with holy water and renew your baptismal commitment.

