

Thursday Prayers 12th December 2024 Ely Cathedral and on Zoom 10.30am

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85209298628?pwd=VDTrciGq12BVz8luyEa34M6BRLZDIK.1>

Meeting ID: 852 0929 8628

Passcode: 080127

Good morning and welcome to our prayer time today.
Let us begin by saying The Mothers' Union Prayer together:

Loving Lord,

We thank you for your love so freely given to us all.

We pray for families around the world.

Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share your love through the encouragement, strengthening and support of marriage and family life. Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship, and in love and service reach out as your hands across the world.

In Jesus', name. Amen

Reading: Luke 3: 7-18

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin 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. ⁹ 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."

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What, then, should we do?" ¹¹ In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" ¹³ He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with ¹⁷ the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Reflection

In this passage John warns the crowd of people around him, not to make the assumption that because they are the descendants of Abraham, they will not escape God's wrath and vengeance. They must repent. He explains to them that they must look outward to those less fortunate, rather than being selfish and self centred. Therefore, they should give to those less fortunate than themselves. They should share their wealth. The tax collectors should take only what was required, rather than making money for themselves on the side. The soldiers should not falsely accuse people in order to receive bribes.

Many of the crowd around John, thought that he might be the Messiah and it is at this time that John makes it very clear that it is not him. His use of the expression “not fit to untie his sandals,” shows how inferior he feels to Jesus, as only a lowly servant would do that task. However, John leaves them and us with the knowledge that the Messiah was close and that he would baptize with the Holy Spirit and cleanse with fire. The use of fire metaphor would have been very significant to the Jewish members of the crowd, because they knew how God used fire to right wrongs. So there is hope that can drive the people to believe that when Jesus comes and baptizes them they can change into a more empathetic people. This is the “Good News” for which they have been waiting. This is a reading informing us of the “Good News “of Jesus’ coming, but in it John informs us unless there is repentance and a change in our ways there will be no benefit from this amazing gift from God.

At this time of the year when we are thinking of the preparations for Christmas we should reflect on the great gift that we have received from God. It is easy to be wound up with shopping and cooking to leave Christ out of Christmas. We should remember John’s lesson that we should share and think of others. In Advent we should focus on how fortunate we are and that we should think of those less fortunate. We are spending money on our friends and families, but we should think beyond this and remember those less fortunate. Much of society seem tied to wealth and possessions.

Last month Debbie referred to the MU Campaign “Empower Her Literacy” an excellent campaign, which if supported will transform so many women across the world. There are many gifts on the Mothers’ Union website and in the catalogue offering gifts not of “things”, but of education and skills. These gifts are beyond possessions they can lead people out of poverty and depression to change their lives. There is a famous Christian Aid quotation, “Give a man a fish and you can feed him for a day. Give a man a net and he can feed himself forever.” Instead of “man” read person or in our case “woman and teach a woman literacy and numeracy and she can improve the lot for her family and her village. It is a fact that in societies where women are educated, the expectation of the people improves, which leads to a positive effect on the whole of that society.

Let us remember Jesus’ teaching “This is the first and great commandment. Love the Lord thy God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second is love thy neighbour as thyself.” These two commandments if followed are all we need to ensure a fairer world. As Christmas nears, let us take a moment to see how we can alter our behaviour and see a way to look beyond our immediate environment and consider who exactly our neighbour is.

Let us pray

Dear Lord, you sent John to prepare the way for your Son. Enable us to hear your voice above the hubbub and busyness and to rise above it and to be open to your spirit. **Amen**

Lord God, you sent John to baptise for repentance and forgiveness. Give to all people humility to examine their lives with honesty and devotion. Lead us away from deceit in ourselves and others. **Amen**

Lord, we watch and wait for your reign of peace.

We pray for Jerusalem and the Middle East, Ukraine, Sudan and all the conflicts around the world.

As the world is in such turmoil, we ask for your help for those who are suffering.

We particularly hold before you the children and young people, who have seen such atrocities. May they reach safety and find the love and support that they need.

May all nations lay aside the ways of darkness and put on the armour of light. **Amen**

We pray for those who are sick, particularly those who are lonely, despairing and struggling to survive in the present economic climate. May they feel the support from our prayers and the knowledge that they are not alone and they are valued. **Amen**

Our heavenly Father, as once again we prepare for Christmas, help us to find time our busy lives for quiet and thought and prayer; that we may reflect upon the wonder of your love and allow the story of the Saviour's birth to penetrate our hearts and minds.

So may our joy be deeper, our worship more real, and our lives worthier of all that you have done for us through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

We will have a moment of silence to focus on our own prayers.

We now sing the hymn: **Hark the glad sound.**

1. Hark, the glad sound! the Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne
and every voice a song.

2. On him the Holy Spirit pours
the promised sacred fire;
his power and wisdom, zeal and love
the anointed Son inspire.

3. He comes the prisoners to release
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

4. He comes to cleanse the human mind
from thickest scales of sin,
and by the entrance of his words
give light and life within.

5. He comes the broken heart to bind,
the wounded soul to heal,
and in his gospel to the poor
God's riches to reveal.

(P. Doddridge, 1702-51 Melody from Ravenscroft's Psalter, 1621)

From the MU Annual Prayer Diary for December

As we journey through Advent we praise God for his Word which leads us to the stable of salvation.

As we draw near to adore the Christ-child, we share in the joy that the risen Lord accompanies us every step of the way. **Amen**

Our Intercessions - We pray for:

The worldwide work of the Mothers Union, our Worldwide President Sheran Harper and the new Worldwide President Kathleen Snow.

The Chief Executive, Bev Jullien and for all those who work at Mary Sumner House, supporting members.

Our province of Canterbury and all the members of the Canterbury Province and our Provincial President, Kathryn Anderson and the new PP Comfort Fearon.

We pray for our whole Diocese, for our Diocesan President, Hazel, for those on the Trustee Board and those leading branches, those working in the Task groups, our deaneries, our chaplains and our members. We pray for events being held in the parishes.

In the Wave of Prayer: 10 – 12 December

Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria; Ely in England and Karimnagar in India.

This Advent may Christ deliver us from distress, despair, trials and fire. He is the fulfilment of our hope. May he restore us from the brokenness and scars caused by our sins as he is the Giver of eternal life full of joy, peace and love. **Amen**

(Mothers' Union Prayer Diary for 12th of December)

Let us say together The Mothers' Union Thursday prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers, we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Before we say the Grace, I would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year and thank you for your friendship and fellowship throughout the year.

Let us say together **The Grace**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen**