

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Bible Notes
October - December
2025

October 1st

Hebrews 1 v1

God

Religion cannot be irrelevant. Religion cannot be unimportant. What we think about God matters more than what we think about anything. In fact, what we think about God determines what we think about everything. God is ultimate significance. Everything – matter, energy, life, relationships, law, values – derives its significance from God.

You cannot therefore be casual about faith. Christ is all in all or He is nothing, nothing more than a dead person. The most important fact about you is whether you know God. The most relevant question anyone could ask you is, “Are you a Christian?”

October 2nd

Hebrews 1 v1

God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets...

How might we come to know God? Many of us see something of the wonder of God in the beauty of His Creation. I know God through what I was taught when I was growing up by my parents, other family members, teachers & friends. Maybe you too know Him at least in part as a result of your upbringing. Perhaps you have come to know God in later life through your experiences, from seeking Him deliberately, perhaps in a church congregation or in reading the Bible or through prayer. I meet God in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, in public worship & private prayer, in my own personal Bible reading and in listening to other people preach, in walking in the woods or riding my bike. Perhaps you do too. God might surprise us, revealing Himself in ways we don't expect.

The greatness of God is such that we can only truly know Him insofar as He makes Himself known to us. He makes Himself known to people individually. He makes Himself known corporately to the Church. He makes Himself known in the world. We can only assess the authenticity of what we believe to be of God by reference to what He has already made known of Himself in Jesus.

3rd October

Hebrews 1 v2

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.

God has spoken to us. Jesus is the Word of God. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made: and all the hosts of them by the breath (spirit) of his mouth. And the Spirit (Breath) of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.* In Hebrew the word for spirit is the same as the word for breath. *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword.*

God's Word is manifest in Creation. God speaks to us through Moses and the Prophets. In the life, death & resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Word is fulfilled and His revelation of Himself is complete – though we shall not see Him as He is until we see Him in Heaven face to face.

4th October

Hebrews 1 v2

Whom he hath appointed heir of all things

God is love. The Unity of the Trinity, the Unity of Father, Son & Holy Spirit, is love. That love which is intrinsic to God overflows to create, redeem and sanctify all that is, not least the human race, us who are made to be like Him. In the Person of Jesus Christ, humanity and divinity coexist. The universe exists to the glory of God. Christ gives up His entitlement as God when He takes on Himself our human nature, dying with us & for us. In so doing, He redeems us, restoring our inheritance as the children of God. It is in Christ that we are heirs of the Kingdom, co-heirs with Him. Everything was created by Him and for Him (Colossians 1¹⁶) and, insofar as by faith we dwell in Him and He in us, everything was created for us.

You probably gather that I am struggling to understand this and to explain what little I do understand. The best thing to do is simply to worship God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

It has been said (The Westminster Confession): "*The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever*" Go ahead. Do that.

5th October (Trinity 16)

Hebrews 1 v2

By whom also he made the worlds.

Many churches will be celebrating Harvest Festival today – when we thank God for meeting all our material needs. At least one Church is holding a Confirmation service, thinking about the harvest of souls, when God gathers His faithful people into their eternal home.

O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O Lord my God! When I in
awesome wonder
Consider all the works
Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the
mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the
universe displayed,

Then sings my soul, my
Saviour God to Thee,
How great Thou art! How
great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my
Saviour God to Thee,
How great Thou art! How
great Thou art!

When through the woods
and forest glades I
wander,
And hear the birds sing
sweetly in the trees;

When I look down from
lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and
feel the gentle breeze.

And when I think that
God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die – I scarce
can take it in.
That on the cross my
burden my gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take
away my sin:

When Christ shall come
with shout of acclamation
And take me home – what
joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in
humble adoration
And there proclaim, my
God, how great Thou art!

6th October

Hebrews 1 v3

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person

Jesus is God. So everything that is true of Jesus is true of God. In His divine nature, He is not merely the image of God; He is *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*. In His human nature, He is the perfect man. Adam was made in the image of God. Adam was made a son of God. The image of God in Adam is marred, as it is in all of us, by sin, our defiance in the face of God's love for us. Adam, though a son of God, disobeys his Father and hides from Him. This is what human beings do. This is unredeemed human nature, what St Paul calls the flesh (which lusts against the spirit). This rejection of the Source of our life brings upon us the punishment of death. But Jesus the Man does not rebel against God. He is obedient even to the extent of dying on the Cross for us, though He Himself knew no sin. It is as the perfect human being that Jesus is the image of God. And, through His grace, we are made like Him, adopted back into the family of God, co-heirs with Christ, restored to eternal life, renewed in His image.

7th October

Hebrews 1 v3

And upholding all things by the word of his power

Why is there something rather than nothing? Where does everything come from? Where will it all end? What guarantees are there that what exists today will exist tomorrow? The answer is that all things are in the Hands of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. He (Jesus) *is before all things, and by him all things consist* (Colossians 1¹⁷). *We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

8th October

Hebrews 1 v3

When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

These things are beyond our human comprehension. We can only glimpse the truth which underlies them. All we can sensibly do is worship. In fact worship preceded what you might call Theology or faith seeking understanding. It is because we worship the Father, the

Son & the Holy Spirit that we understand that each is truly God and therefore worthy of our praise.

1 Rejoice, the Lord is King;
Your Lord and King adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing,
And triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

2 Jesus, the Saviour, reigns,
The God of truth and love;
When He has purged our
stains,
He took his seat above;
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

3 His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus giv'n:
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

4 Rejoice in glorious hope!
Our Lord and judge shall come
And take His servants up
To their eternal home:
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

October 9th

Hebrews 1 v4

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

There are several instances in both the Old & New Testaments when people are visited by angels. The usual response is, not surprisingly fear, and, very often, a desire to worship the angel. In such cases, the angel forbids the human being to worship him. and tells him to worship only God. Jesus is not an angel, not even a very superior angel; He is God. Angels, like us, are created beings. Jesus is *the only-begotten son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made*: Likewise, the Holy Spirit *proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified*. Only God is worthy of worship. He is worthy of worship both because of Who He is and because of what He has accomplished. *We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

October 10th

Hebrews 1 v5

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

The books of the New Testament take the psalms as prophecies of Jesus. Now we might think of psalms as being more like hymns. And they are like hymns and spiritual songs. They were sung in the Temple in Jerusalem and also in people's homes and when they were on pilgrimage, later on in the synagogues, and, no doubt, on other occasions as well.

We Christians perhaps have a curious relationship with psalms. Reading the NT, we see in them prophecies of Jesus. We also find in the Book of Psalms a tremendous spiritual resource. We may use them in our private prayer and when we worship together in Church. Clergy & members of religious orders pray the psalms every day. But there are difficulties. One of those difficulties is that psalms are poetry and are meant to be sung. It isn't easy to translate poetry from one language (Hebrew) into another (say English) in which the rhythms are quite different and then to set the words to appropriate music. The result can be hard to understand and difficult to sing. You really need a good choir to sing psalms or to lead a congregation in singing psalms. Psalms have been re-written in metrical English verse and sung to conventional hymn tunes. *The Lord's My Shepherd* does this for Psalm 23 and *All People that on Earth Do Dwell* does it for Psalm 100. These are good examples but there are many bad ones, which we don't generally now sing. We can of course always say psalms. They're easier to follow that way, but they are missing a dimension without music. The other difficulty arises from the fact that psalms are such a wonderful resource for worship. They cover the whole gamut of human emotions, which necessarily means that they include some quite horrible thoughts. If the psalms were all sweetness and light, they would not be able to satisfy all our needs. But we don't want to *own* thoughts of revenge, retribution and the destruction of the people who wrong us.

Jesus sang and probably said the psalms. We use the psalms in the light of our knowledge of Him. We understand the psalms, as we understand

the whole of the Bible, God's written Word, in our relationship with Jesus, the Word made flesh.

As for psalms as prophecies of Jesus, if we think of them as the Psalms of David, it makes sense that they are fulfilled in great David's greater Son.

October 11th

Hebrews 1 v5

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.

Hebrews is quoting Psalm 2⁷ & II Samuel 7¹⁴. In their original context, they are about God's promise to David, that he and his descendants would be Kings of Israel. In the Old Testament, the King of Israel is God's son metaphorically and by adoption. In the New Testament fulfilment of these promises, the words have an infinitely deeper and more wonderful significance. Jesus is literally the Son of God and His Kingship is universal.

October 12th (Trinity 17)

Hebrews 1v6

And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

This verse gave me problems. Where does it say in the OT *And let all the angels of God worship him*? The answer appears to be in Deuteronomy 32⁴³, but there is no mention of angels there in most English Bibles. Most English Bibles are, in the OT, translations of the Hebrew text. Most of the Hebrew manuscripts we have date from the ninth century AD. We do, however, have Greek & Latin translations of much older Hebrew texts. The Greek text of Deuteronomy 32⁴³ does include the words *And let all the angels of God worship him*. The author of Hebrews was very likely using a Greek Bible for his quotations. It is possible that the Greek is the correct translation of an original Hebrew text which is now lost and which had been copied inaccurately to give us the Hebrew text we now have, of which most English Bibles are a translation. Anyway, the point is that in the OT, the angels are exhorted to worship God & the NT understands this to mean that they should worship Jesus.

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

October 13th

Hebrews 1 v7

And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

These words come from that tremendous hymn of praise Psalm 104. Psalm 103 praises God for His work in redemption; 104 praises God for His creation. Praise uplifts the spirit. It is what we shall be doing in all eternity if we die in faith. Seraphim are beings of fire. Enjoy the hymn based on Isaiah 6.

1 Bright the vision that
delighted
once the sight of Judah's seer;
sweet the countless tongues
united
to entrance the prophet's ear.
2 Round the Lord in glory
seated
cherubim and seraphim
filled his temple, and repeated
each to each the alternate hymn:
3 'Lord, thy glory fills the
heaven;
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto thee be glory given,
holy, holy, holy, Lord.'

4 Heaven is still with glory
ringing,
earth takes up the angels' cry,
'Holy, holy, holy,' singing,
'Lord of hosts, the Lord most
high.'
5 With his seraph train before
him,
with his holy church below,
thus unite we to adore him,
bid we thus our anthem flow:
6 'Lord, thy glory fills the
heaven;
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto thee be glory given,
holy, holy, holy, Lord.'

October 14th

Hebrews 1vv 8&9

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Again the Epistle to the Hebrews takes words originally addressed to the King of Israel (the adopted and metaphorical son of God) and understands them as fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God, the Word made flesh. The psalm quoted is number 45 and is about the king and his bride. In the NT, the Bride of the King, the Christ, the Anointed One, is the Church.

The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord

She is His new creation
By water and the Word

From heaven, He came and
sought her
To be His holy bride

With His own blood He bought
her
And for her life He died.

October 15th

Hebrews 1 vv 10-12

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

These words are from Psalm 102. The psalmist is praising God. Hebrews praises Jesus in the words the psalmist addresses to God. *Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost.* The words of the psalm may be taken as a prophecy of the End of the World, when *he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

October 16th

Hebrews 1 v13

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

The words *Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool* come from Psalm 110 addressed to the King and High Priest – the role, which we shall see in Hebrews, is fulfilled in Jesus. God does not make these promises to angels, great as they are. He makes them to His Son Who is infinitely greater than any created being.

October 17th

Hebrews 1 v14

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Angels are not created to be worshipped. Nothing created ought to be worshipped. Angels, like us, are created to worship God and to serve Him & to care for His people. So we pray at Michaelmas.

O EVERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy Angels always do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 18th (St Luke)

Hebrews 2 vv 1-4

If I found a vase in my attic and an expert told me that it was without value, I might dispose of it or use it to keep spare screws in. If, however, someone gave me a priceless vase I should treasure it and take good care of it. Either the way, the vase was free to me. If I carelessly broke or lost the valueless vase, I would have lost nothing. If I lost or broke the priceless vase, I would have lost everything.

God's grace to us, His gift of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus sends, is free. It is definitely not valueless. It is priceless. Eternal life is infinitely more valuable than we could ever afford.

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 19th (Trinity 18)

Hebrews 2 vv 5-10

Hebrews is quoting Psalm 8, which marvels at the glory of God's work in the heavens and is awestruck by the Creator's special love for the human race. He has singled us out, made in His image, stewards of His creation. Less glorious than the angels – spiritual beings – we humans – material beings - are lower than the angels. We fail to fulfil our potential as made in God's image because of sin. Jesus, the sinless human being, the very image of God, fulfils our human calling to be God's viceroys. Because of His Death on the Cross and Resurrection, Jesus Christ will reign over all things in all eternity (*His Kingdom shall have no end.*) and we – we in Him & He in us – will reign with Him as kings and priests.

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 20th

Hebrews 2 v9

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

But we see Jesus. Very precious words!

Jesus, then, eternally infinitely greater than the angels, surrendered His glory at God's right hand and became one with us, a little lower than the angels. In human form, He experienced death in solidarity with us, the penalty for sin, though He was Himself without sin, so that through repentance and faith in Him, risen with Christ, we should share in His exaltation. This is all very hard to understand, but cling onto this: *But we see Jesus.* And so we do in Holy Communion, in the Bible, in Christian fellowship, in prayer, in the marvels of Creation, wherever God chooses to make Himself known to us.

October 21st

Hebrews 2v10

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

God the Father, in perfect unity with God the Son, Who is one person with the Son of Man, brings *many sons to glory* (ie us Christians), through the perfection of Christ's suffering for us on the Cross. I fear I haven't made this verse much clearer, but the wonder of it all and its personal significance is much better expressed in Wesley's hymn.

2 'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal
dies!

Who can explore His strange
design?

In vain the firstborn seraph
tries

To sound the depths of love
divine!

'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no
more.

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die
for me!

3 He left His Father's throne
above,

So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,

And bled for Adam's helpless
race;

'Tis mercy all, immense and
free;

For, O my God, it found out
me.

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die
for me!

October 22nd

Hebrews 2 v11

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Thinking about Christmas yet? It gets earlier every year! Never mind for now, however, the catering, the presents and the decorations. Pause for a moment and consider the true meaning of Christmas in the light of this verse. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.* The Son of God is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters because we are all one with Him. He makes us holy as He is holy. Being made holy by Him & in Him, we are His brothers & sisters.

October 23rd

Hebrews 2 v12

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

This is a quotation of Psalm 22²²: *I will declare thy Name unto my brethren : in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.* Psalm 22 is the one which begins **MY GOD**, *my God, look upon me; why hast thou forsaken me* and is considered to be a prophecy of our Lord's crucifixion. Through His Death, Christ overcomes the power of evil. His Victory is proclaimed in His Resurrection. In the power of His Holy Spirit, all that He has done for us, everything which He has achieved for us is proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

Note the change of word from *congregation* in the psalm to *church* in the epistle. The sense in both cases is of a people called together by God, the worshipping congregation, the whole people of God.

October 24th

Hebrews 2 v13

And again, I will put my trust in him. And again behold I and the children which God hath given me.

These are two quotations from Isaiah 8 vv17&18. Isaiah is expressing faith in God in difficult times. The children God has given him are signs of God's faithfulness to him, to the nation and the world. The epistle, therefore, affirms our Lord's faithfulness and obedience to His heavenly Father. God's children, His brethren, are signs, witnesses, of God's promised salvation. Perhaps we should go back to Isaiah 7¹⁴: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name*

Immanuel. This may have been partially fulfilled when Isaiah and his young wife were blessed (in the normal way) with a son – a witness of God's faithfulness in troubled times. It is completely fulfilled when the Blessed Virgin Mary bears Jesus, the faithful witness.

October 25th

Hebrews 2 vv 14

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh & blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil;

So God the Son, the eternal second person of the Blessed Holy Trinity, united His divine nature with our human nature and experienced everything which it is to be human, including temptation (to which He did not yield) and death (to which He did yield). In voluntarily accepting our death, He destroyed the power of death and set us free from bondage to sin and the fear of death.

October 26th (Trinity 19)

Hebrews 2 v15

And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Are you afraid to die? Probably you are at least a little bit. Most people are afraid a little bit of dying. Well some people will say that is the dying they fear. It's not so much the being dead; it's how you get there. An illness, an accident, battle, murder, none of them is something we would want to happen. We'd probably like to die quietly in our sleep, though there would be things we wanted to do first: get our affairs in order, say farewell to our friends, make up any quarrels, get right with God. Are we afraid of what lies beyond the grave? Some people think that there is nothing. That's a bit disconcerting in itself. Most of the world's religions teach that there will be some sort of final accounting, with consequences dependent on how we have lived our lives. Jesus teaches us that there will be a Judgment. The possibilities are hell and heaven. Hell is to be feared, but it is avoidable through faith & repentance. Heaven is God's free gift to all who repent and believe the Gospel. We may approach death with some trepidation, but we are following in Jesus' footsteps. He's been through it all Himself. He is with us & we can trust Him to bring us to our final destination. (Next page hymn & collect)

“A little while,” our Lord shall come,
And we shall wander here no more;
He’ll take us to our Father’s home,
Where He for us has gone before.

“A little while,” He’ll come again;
Let us the precious hours redeem;
Our only grief to give Him pain,
Our joy to serve and follow Him.

“A little while,” ’t will soon be past;
Why should we shun the promised cross?
O let us in His footsteps haste,
Counting for Him all else but loss.

“A little while,” come, Saviour, come!
For thee thy Bride has tarried long;
Take thy poor wearied pilgrims home,
To sing the new eternal song.

O GOD, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee; Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 27th Hebrews 2 vv 16-18
Jesus is not an angel (or any other created being); He is God (*of one substance with the Father*). Jesus did not become an angel. He became a man. He totally understands therefore what it is to be human. He recognises our trials and temptations. He shares our sorrows & our joys. He is therefore the perfect high priest, the bridge from God to man & man to God. When we pray, He understands us both because He is God (and therefore knows everything) and because He knows what it is to be us from His own experience.

October 28th (St Simon & St Jude) Hebrews 3 v1
Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle & High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus:
ALMIGHTY God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*
Through Jesus, we Christians are holy brethren & called by Heaven. We all have our own ministry, our own part to play, each one derived from Him.

October 29th Hebrews 3 vv 2-6
Moses was a great man of God. He was commissioned by God to lead the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. He faced many difficulties and temptations, much opposition. He was instrumental in God performing many miracles. God gave His people the Law through Moses. Moses was faithful in the household of God. But, great though He was, Moses was a mere man, a created being. He had many faults. He made mistakes. Moses was a servant in God’s house. But Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Creator of God’s household. He made us and redeemed us Himself from slavery to sin & the fear of death. It is He Who will lead us home to the Promised Land. He is the One Who guides us, feeds us & defends us on the way. He sets people all nations free and offers them the gift of eternal life.

October 30th Hebrews 3 vv 7-11
These verses are a quotation from Psalm 95 – *Venite, Exultemus, Domino*, which is said at Prayer Book Morning Prayer every day except for Easter. This psalm summons the congregation to sing God’s praises. It proclaims His greatness and His care for us. He is our Creator & our Shepherd. Then follow the verses quoted in our epistle reading. The people who were set free from slavery in Egypt did not hear God’s voice in the sense of taking His words into their hearts and obeying Him. They disregarded and disobeyed His promises and His commandments. The consequence was that that generation never entered the Promised Land. They died in the Wilderness. It was their sons and daughters who inherited the land of Canaan. The only exceptions were the two men who had trusted in God themselves and told the rest of the people that they should do the same – Caleb and Joshua. Joshua succeeded Moses as leader. The name Joshua is a more Hebrew version of the Greek Jesus. That is important for what follows.

October 31st Hebrews 3 v12
Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.
The readers of this epistle were facing the prospect of persecution. Nevertheless, they should trust God. What might make us doubt God’s care for us? Intellectual difficulties? The evil that there is in the world?

Prayers which seem to go unanswered? An aridity in which we no longer feel God's Presence as much as perhaps we used to do? Nevertheless, trust in God. Hang on in there. Your faith might be as tiny as a grain of mustard seed. Like the father of the possessed boy in Mark 9²⁴, maybe you can only pray *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*. But never give up. The LORD says to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31⁶): *Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, not be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee; or forsake thee*. I'm sure He says the same to all who trust in Him.

November 1st (All Saints) Hebrews 3 vv 13&14
Since I've been worshipping at Higham, I've had to get used to the Roman Mass which we use there. There are aspects of it I'm not sure about. Some things, I think, are better expressed in the Church of England's *Common Worship*. But, over all, I believe that the Roman Mass is richer than our *Common Worship*. I'm very conscious in our worship at Higham of *the beauty of holiness*. (Personally, I'd go for the C of E's Book of Common Prayer – sound Theology, beautifully expressed, but it's not up to me.) One of the facets of our faith which shines more brightly in the Mass is the *Communion of Saints*, in which we proclaim our belief when we say the Creed. I don't just mean our communion or fellowship with the saints already in heaven, but also our fellowship with all God's faithful people, including specifically those who are actually present with us in Church as we celebrate Holy Communion. We pray for one another there & then, including asking for God's forgiveness of one another's sins and that God will make our sacrifice of praise there and then acceptable to Himself. As the Epistle says, we are responsible for one another on our individual spiritual journeys and for the corporate life of the Church. We are all partakers of Christ. We belong to Him. We are members of one another.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

November 2nd (Trinity 20) Hebrews 3 vv 15-19
There is an urgency to respond to God's Voice. There is no time like the present! Trust & obey now. Don't procrastinate and prevaricate. Don't put it off to a more convenient time or when you eventually get around to giving God further consideration. There's a lot of work to be done to bring in the Kingdom of God. We need to get on with it if we are to have a part in it. Respond to God's call while it is today. Tomorrow may be too late.

O ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that though wouldest have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

November 3rd Hebrews 4 vv 1&2
God's Word (Good News) was proclaimed to the wilderness generation, just as the Gospel is proclaimed to us. Because the Word was received without faith by the redeemed slaves in the wilderness, it became a word of judgment & condemnation rather than one of freedom in the Promised Land. When the Gospel is proclaimed today, some of the seed falls on the path or on stony ground or among thorns and produces no fruit. The Gospel only takes root and bears fruit where there is faith & faith is the gift of God. So prayer is prerequisite for mission. We shall only succeed in building the Kingdom of God if we work with Him faithfully.

November 4th Hebrews 4 vv 3-8
Joshua (same name as Jesus) led the children of the generation who refused God in the wilderness into the Promised Land. But that was far from all there is to God's promise to give His people rest. If that promise were completely fulfilled when the Israelites crossed the Jordan and took possession of the land of Canaan, why would the Psalm of David (95), composed & sung hundreds of years after the Exodus, speak of a rest yet to come? A rest into which the faithful would be admitted, but from which the faithless would effectively exclude themselves? The answer is that there is a rest yet to come, infinitely more wonderful, than Canaan's land of milk and honey, an eternity in the sublime Presence of God.

November 5th

Hebrews 4 vv 9&10

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Sometimes, when I have felt exhausted, I have revelled in those words, *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.* What do we think of when we think of the Sabbath? Older people might have memories of a boring day on which you couldn't have any fun & the only thing to do was to go to Church. Younger people would probably think it very strange if everything were closed and going to Church on a Sunday was conceived of as a duty. Yep! We messed up the Sabbath as we have messed up so any of God's good gifts to us. The Sabbath should be kept as a foretaste of heaven. We ought indeed to gather together for worship – our duty & our joy – celebrating with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven - the service which Jesus gave us. not only as a memorial of what He has done, but also in enjoying His Presence with us now and a foretaste of what is to come. We ought to have time to rest from daily chores. We ought to have time to relax with our loved ones. And we should expect the people who work for us to have those same opportunities. The Sabbath rest is a foretaste of the eternal rest which remains to the people of God.

November 6th

Hebrews 4 v11

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any many fall after the same example of unbelief.

A radio set is a receiver. The programmes are made many miles away. In the case of recordings, they may have been made many aeons ago. The words and music are converted into electromagnetic waves which are broadcast over a wide area. Radio sets which are tuned into the right channel then receive them and you or I can hear the programmes. All we have to do is to tune in. Similarly, God has done everything necessary. His Word is broadcast throughout the universe. All we have to do is to tune in. In order to tune in, we need only faith. We're guided in tuning in. Most radio dials tell you what frequency you are on, what channels you can pick up. My new digital radio not only finds the channels for me but also memorises the channel I last used. So there is not much work on our part, only faith. God does the rest. We do have a part to play, to tune in to Him, with His assistance. There is some labour on our part in entering into his rest. *Assist us with thy grace.*

November 7th

Hebrews 4 vv 13 & 14

There is no point in trying to conceal our failings, our sins, from God or even ourselves. Nothing is hidden from the Word of God. I wonder what the writer of the Epistle exactly means by the Word of God? Many Christians understand this passage to be about the Bible. The Bible reveals God's Nature to us and what He requires of us, His promises and His commandments. The Bible has the power to prompt our consciences, to open up our minds to a realistic self-assessment of our lives. But I can't think of anywhere else in the Scriptures where the whole Bible together is actually called the Word of God, though of course it is treated as such by Jesus and Paul and other teachers & preachers in the New Testament. For New Testament writers (with the possible exception of Peter in his second letter), the Bible is what we think of as the Old Testament. The NT hadn't been put together. They were still writing the individual books which would later be recognised as the New Testament by the Church, collected together and venerated as Holy Scripture together with the books of the Old Testament.

The Word of God is of course Jesus. He certainly knows everything about us. He is both our Judge & the Atonement for our sins. But Jesus is only given the actual title *Word of God* in what we call the Johannine books – the Gospel, Epistles and Revelation of John. Hebrews doesn't read like the Johannine literature. Maybe the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews just meant the phrase *Word of God* in a more general sense, as it used in the Old Testament. The Word of God effects what it proclaims. Psalm 33: 8. *Let all the earth fear the Lord : stand in awe of him, all ye that dwell in the world. 9. For he spake, and it was done : he commanded, and it stood fast.*

You might have noticed that I have been trying to avoid naming the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He is not named in the actual text of the epistle. The only person named is *our brother Timothy*, from which we may infer that the writer was one of Paul's circle. The King James Bible does attribute Hebrews to Paul, reflecting a long and strong tradition. Modern scholars mainly think that Hebrews is so different both in content and in style from the letters which we are certain were written by Paul that it must have been written by somebody else. More conservative scholars, however, point out that Paul might have changed his style when writing Hebrews because it was intended for a readership different from the addressees of his other letters.

November 8th

Hebrews 4 v15

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

It's very frustrating when you're sitting in a congregation & the preacher says something which you know is wrong, but you can't contradict him. Perhaps, you've experienced that more often than I have. To be fair, I did say always to check what I said in the pulpit against what the Bible says. I even invited people to tell me after the service if I had got something wrong & said I would correct any mistakes I made in the morning service at Evensong.

Anyway, this guy was preaching on the Nicene Creed, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. It was a superb sermon but for one thing. He said that Jesus could not sin. If He had been unable to sin, He could not have been tempted. But He was tempted by the Devil, just as we are. The point is that, of His own free choice, He resisted all kinds of temptation. He knows what it is to be human from His own experience.

November 9th (Trinity 21)

Hebrews 4 v16

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Today is Remembrance Sunday. There's a lot of sin in war. There's a lot of suffering in war. We need to be forgiven. We need to be comforted. Where can we obtain mercy and grace? At the Throne of God. Our Lord understands our needs. He alone can meet our needs.

GRANT, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 10th

Hebrews 5 vv 1&2

In the Old Testament, priests were mediators between man and God. They interpreted the Law & passed judgments. They pronounced God's blessing. They taught God's people. They offered sacrifice. They offered intercession and led thanksgiving, praise & worship. Like all of us, they were subject to temptation and sometimes fell badly.

November 11th

Hebrews 5 v3

And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

The Israelite high priest could understand the pressures and temptations of human life because he was also human. To some extent, his education as a priest and his participation in the temple worship might have helped him to resist temptation. On the other hand, being in such a position of honour & power would have brought its own temptations. The priest was a sinner & had to make atonement for his own sins as well as those of the people. Because he was not perfect, neither were his sacrifices and therefore none of them dealt with sin once and for all.

November 12th

Hebrews 5 vv 4-6

The first high priest was Aaron, Moses' brother. He ministered before the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle. The Ark & the Tabernacle were modelled on the vision of Heaven which God revealed to Moses on Mt Sinai. In Solomon's time, the Tabernacle was replaced by the Temple – constructed on the same model. The Ark, imagined as the Throne of God, was housed in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. After Aaron, the priesthood was hereditary. You didn't apply or audition to be a priest. You were born to the role, though sometimes God intervened if the priest was unworthy. God chose Jesus to be the great high priest. It's not a job the man Jesus applied for. God chose Jesus to be His high priest, just as Jesus chose us to be His people.

November 13th

Hebrews 5 vv 7-9

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had the option. He could have backed out of being crucified for the sins of the world, but He didn't. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. He earned what was His by right – eternal priesthood and kingship. In Him, we His people comprise a royal priesthood. He fulfils all God's promises, which, through Him, are ours. I can't help feeling that this commentary must be hard going for some of you, but Jesus isn't a puzzle for us to solve. He is everything the hymn says & more and our part is to praise Him.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Brother,
Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,

My Lord, my Life, my Way, my
End,
Accept the praise I bring.

November 14th

Hebrews 5 vv 10-14

In Genesis chapter 14, Abraham got involved in one of the many middle-eastern wars. He rescued his nephew Lot & his family who had been taken prisoner. He brought back the plunder the victors had taken. One of the plundered cities was Jerusalem which, at the time, was ruled by Melchizedek who was both king & high priest. Melchizedek offered Abraham bread & wine and also paid him tithes. Melchizedek, then, sets the scene for Jesus, Who is King of Kings & Lord of Lords our great High Priest, Who donates Himself to us in bread & wine.

November 15th

Hebrews 6 vv 1-8

The people to whom this epistle are addressed are facing persecution. It would be only too easy to fall away, to drop out of the Church, to deny Christ. When Peter was challenged after Jesus had been arrested and was being tried for His life, he denied that he had ever known Jesus and the cock crowed. Perfectly understandable. The spirit might be willing but the flesh is weak. In the Parable of the Sower, the seed is the Word of God. Some falls on the footpath and never comes to anything, but other seed looks as if it is growing well. But the corn growing on stony ground comes to nothing. People who appeared to be faithful fell away when the going got tough. Some of the seed was choked by weeds. It became unfruitful. The recipients of the Word were too busy with the things of this life ever to produce a harvest for God. Only the seed sown in good ground lasted & bore good fruit. The epistle warns people of the consequences of not persevering in the faith. If, despite everything which we know of God, we turn away from Him when the going gets difficult, what right do we have to expect another chance?

November 16th (Trinity 22)

Hebrews 6 vv 9-12

It is not unlikely that we are stronger than we think we are. I'm always amazed by the way that quite ordinary people cope with serious trouble – terrible illnesses, bereavement, war, all kinds of adversity. Somehow we find the strength to face up to what had thought we could never cope with. Our faith is stronger than we think. It is, after all, the gift of God. **LORD**, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 17th

Hebrews 6 vv 13-20

It's a bit hard to grasp what the author means by saying that God makes His promise to Abraham doubly sure by swearing an oath. The principal point, however, is that God's promise is utterly dependable. Abraham went through various trials and tribulations, but God was with Him and the promise is being fulfilled. In Abraham's seed (son) all nations of the earth would be blessed. *In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is on the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.* This promise begins to be carried out in Isaac and the history of the Israelites as we read it in the OT. This promise is finally fulfilled in Jesus. His mother Mary sang while Jesus was still in her womb: *He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel : as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.* We therefore have a sure hope in Christ.

1 Will your anchor hold in the
storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their
wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and
the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm
remain?

Refrain:

We have an anchor that keeps
the soul
steadfast and sure while the
billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which
cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the
Saviour's love.

2 It is safely moored; 'twill the
storm withstand,
for 'tis well-secured by the
Saviour's hand.
Though the tempest rage and
the wild winds blow,
not an angry wave shall our
barque o'erflow.

[Refrain]

3 When our eyes behold
through the gath'ring night
the city of gold, our harbour
bright,
we shall anchor fast by the
heav'nly shore,
with the storms all past
forevermore. [Refrain]

The anchor is within the veil, ie secure in the Holy of Holies – the very Presence of God. You couldn't ask for a stronger guarantee than that. Jesus, the eternal High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek has gone before us and opened the way for us to follow Him to the Throne of Grace.

November 18th

Hebrews 7 vv 1-3

The Melchi part of the name means King. Melchizedek was King of Jerusalem. Salem means peace. So Melchizedek was King of Peace. The zedek part of his name means righteousness. So he is King of Righteousness. Very likely, there were kings and priests in this succession for centuries before David made Jerusalem his capital. Zadok the priest may well have belonged to this succession. (It's the consonants that count in Hebrew. No details are given of Melchizedek's ancestry or progeny. Maybe each holder of the office of king and priest in Jerusalem became the Melchizedek as each Egyptian king became the Pharaoh. The effect was an unchanging and timeless priesthood. Melchizedek therefore prefigures Jesus in Whom the roles of King & Priest find their true fulfilment.

1 King of glory, King of peace,
I will love Thee;
and that love may never cease,
I will move Thee.

Thou hast granted my request,
Thou hast heard me;
Thou didst note my working
breast,
Thou hast spared me.

Thou didst clear me;
and alone, when they replied,
Thou didst hear me.

3 Sev'n whole days, not one in
sev'n,
I will praise Thee;
in my heart, though not in heav'n,
I can raise Thee.
Small it is, in this poor sort
to enroll Thee:
e'en eternity's too short
to extol Thee.

2 Wherefore with my utmost art
I will sing Thee,
and the cream of all my heart
I will bring Thee.
Though my sins against me cried,

November 19th

Hebrews 7 vv 4-10

You'd pay tithes to your superior, particularly your spiritual superior. So, in paying tithes to Melchizedek, Abraham recognised Melchizedek's superiority over him. The priests in the Temple at Jerusalem were of the tribe of Levi (the same as Moses). The high priests were supposed to be descendants of Moses' brother Aaron. Levi was one of Abraham's twelve great grandsons, each of who fathered the tribes of Israel. So, Melchizedek being superior to Abraham and his descendants, the priesthood of Melchizedek (which prefigures the priesthood of Jesus) is superior to the priesthood ministering in the Temple.

November 20th

Hebrews 7 vv 11-19

The Law couldn't bring people to perfection. If it could, the hearers of the Law would be doers of the Law and there would be no sin in the congregation of the faithful (OT Israel or NT Church). If the sacrifices offered by the Levitical priesthood in the Jerusalem Temple could have vanquished sin for ever, it would have been unnecessary to offer them more than once. What was needed was a new priesthood and a perfect sacrifice and that the commandments of the Law should no longer be merely external to be read off stone tablets but also internal written in our hearts. Jesus is that High Priest. He is that perfect sacrifice. It is His Holy Spirit Who engraves God's law of love on our hearts.

Our Lord's priesthood is qualitatively different from that of the Levitical priests in the Temple. He couldn't be one of them because He wasn't of the Tribe of Levi. He was of the Tribe of Judah, David's tribe, the tribe of kings. He is appointed personally by God. Psalm 110⁴: *The Lord swears, and will not repent : Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech.* However these words were understood in OT times, they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the anointed King & Priest, anointed by the Holy Spirit.

November 21st

Hebrews 7 vv 20-28

I do like the Epistle to the Hebrews, hard as much of it is to understand. *But we see Jesus.* He fulfils all the Law's demands. He is the one true High Priest. He is the perfect sacrifice. Having died once for us, He has overcome the power of death & lives for ever. He perpetually intercedes for us. There is nothing lacking in Him. He saves to the uttermost those who come to God. You can't ask more than that and Jesus is God's free gift to us.

1 How sweet the name of Jesus
sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals
our wounds,
and drives away our fear.

2 It makes the wounded spirit
whole
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest

November 22nd

Hebrews 8 vv 1&2

In the beginning man made God in his own image. That of course is the opposite of what really happened, but human beings do too often behave as if we were the ones in charge, as if we called the shots, as if we were in charge of our religion, our temples, our churches. We carelessly talk about church buildings as if they were the houses of God, when God cannot, of course, be contained in anything created. When Solomon had constructed the Temple at Jerusalem and was in the process of consecrating it, he confessed: *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?* Human beings make images of what they think of as God or gods. The prophet Isaiah points to the incongruity of carving a piece of wood and worshipping the image you have made and then burning what's left over in a fire to keep you warm and cook your dinner. Human beings *changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* We can also form mental images of God which limit our ability to comprehend Who He truly is. *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing that he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things* (St Paul talking to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17^{24&25}). We've nothing to offer to God, save what He gives to us. Psalm 50: 8. *I will not reprove thee because of thy sacrifices, or for thy burnt-offerings : because they were not alway before me. I will take no bullock out of thine house : nor he-goat out of thy folds. For all the beasts of the forest are mine : and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls upon the mountains : and the wild beasts of the field are in my sight. If I be hungry, I will not tell thee : for the whole world is mine, and all that is therein. Thinkest thou that I will eat bulls' flesh : and drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving : and pay thy vows unto the most Highest. And call upon me in the time of trouble : so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise me.* The Temple in which Jesus the High Priest offers Himself in sacrifice is not limited by being of human construction. It is purely the work of God and therefore perfect.

23rd November (Last Sunday after Trinity)

Hebrews 8 vv 3-10

We've established that the Old Covenant was incomplete. The priesthood was imperfect. The sacrifices were imperfect. The centre of worship was only a Temple made by human hands. For too many of the people of God, the Law was something external, a matter of conforming to rules, rather than something that was engraved on their hearts. Now I don't want to be unfair to the OT or to God's ancient people the Jews. The great prophets of the OT and the psalmist and, no doubt, many of the Israelites were very aware of what the LORD requires of His people, of the need for a religion of the heart, of human sin, of Judgment & of God's mercy. Jesus fulfils the Law & the Prophets. He does not abolish them. Micah 6⁸: *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

24th November

Hebrews 8 v11

And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. This teaching goes back to the OT prophets Jeremiah & Ezekiel. We shall not need to be taught about God because we shall know Him for ourselves. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't teach our children about God or that we shouldn't share our faith with our neighbours or that we shouldn't support missionary work at home and abroad. What it does mean is that, by God's grace, our children, our neighbours and those who receive the missionaries' message will no longer be dependent on us or any other outside source of information about God. They will know Him for themselves. My mother taught me to tie my shoelaces. Once I'd got it I was a person who could tie his shoelaces – without instructions, without even thinking about it. My father told me to ride a bike. He taught me how. He supported me in my early attempts. And then I became a cyclist. I ride a bike without directions, without thinking about it. Other guys on the site taught me to start a dumper truck with a starting handle. Once I'd got it, I'd got it. It was part of my skills set. Once you know God, you know Him and you are a Christian.

November 25th

Hebrews 8 vv 12&13

Christ has fulfilled all the Law's demands. There is therefore no more need for the temple sacrifices offered by the Levitical priesthood. If our spirits are in harmony with the Holy Spirit, there is no longer any need for an external law, enforced by a combination of carrots and sticks. That last is a work in process from the time when we first believed until the time we are received into heaven.

1. Love divine, all loves
excelling,
Joy of Heav'n to Earth come
down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown;
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2. Breathe, O breathe thy
loving Spirit
Into ev'ry troubled breast;
Let us all in thee inherit,
Let us find thy promised rest;
Take away our love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

3. Come, Almighty to deliver;
Let us all thy grace receive;

Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always
blessing,
Serve thee as thy host above,
Pray, and praise thee without
ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.

4. Finish, then, thy new
creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory
Till in Heav'n we take our
place,
Till we cast our crowns before
thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and
praise!

November 26th

Hebrews 9 vv 1-5

In both the Tabernacle & the Temple (which was modelled on it), there were two chambers. The priests entered the outer chamber, the sanctuary, through the first veil, to minister every day. There was the seven branched candlestick fuelled with the finest olive oil to burn perpetually. There was the table on which the twelve loaves of the shewbread or bread of the Presence were arranged in two piles of six, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The shewbread is a reminder that God nourishes His people & an offering made back to Him by us in gratitude. *All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.*

We might think of Jesus the Bread of Life when we think about the Bread of the Presence. There was a veil separating this first sanctuary from the Holy of Holies which was only entered once a year on the Day of Atonement by the High Priest, The altar on which incense was offered daily stood just outside this second veil. Within the veil were the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, a golden pot of the manna which had sustained the Israelites for forty years in the Wilderness and Aaron's rod which had budded. (When the tribes of Israel were quarrelling about the right of the Levites to be priests and ministers, God told them to leave a staff representing each tribe in the Tabernacle over night. Aaron's rod budded, bloomed and fruited. So they knew that the Levites were appointed by God to be the priestly tribe.) The golden censor referred to here is probably to do with the altar of incense which was just outside the second veil. Most important of all in the Holy of Holies was the mercy seat which stood for the Throne of God. The cherubim are members of the heavenly host who worship God with the seraphim, the angels & archangels and all the choirs of heaven.

1 Ye watchers and ye holy
ones,
bright seraphs, cherubim, and
thrones,
raise the glad strain, Alleluia!
Cry out, dominions,
princedom, powers,
virtues, archangels, angels'
choirs:
Refrain:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

2 O higher than the cherubim,
more glorious than the
seraphim,
lead their praises, Alleluia!
Thou bearer of th' eternal
Word,
most gracious, magnify the
Lord: [Refrain]

3 Respond, ye souls in endless
rest,
ye patriarchs and prophets
blest,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Ye holy twelve, ye martyrs
strong,
all saints triumphant, raise the
song: [Refrain]

4 O friends, in gladness let us
sing,
supernal anthems echoing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
To God the Father, God the
Son,
and God the Spirit, Three in
One: [Refrain]

November 27th

Hebrews 9 vv 6-10

There was some debate in the *Times* recently about whether Christian priests could forgive sins. We can obviously forgive sins against ourselves as all Christians are told that we must. *Forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us.* We cannot forgive sins against God. Only God can forgive sins in the absolute sense. What the Church does have the power to do (a power which she discharges through her ordained ministers) is *to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins.* God forgives those who repent & believe, and the Church, the Body of Christ, (often but not exclusively through His ordained ministers) has the power which Christ gave His apostles to pronounce forgiveness. We cannot, however, grant God's forgiveness to the unrepentant non-believer. Neither can we withhold absolution from those who do repent in faith. It is not the ritual which effects forgiveness. It is the penitent heart and the truth of the Gospel to which the ritual bears witness which effects the atonement. Had the ritual in the Jerusalem Temple been capable of dealing with sin once and for all, it would have been unnecessary to repeat it. In reality, God forgave the penitent and the rituals of the Day of Atonement every year acted out this great truth, while, at the same time, preparing the way for Jesus Who would deal with sin once and for all.

November 28th

Hebrews 9 vv 11-14

The sanctuary is neither the Tabernacle, not the Jerusalem Temple. It is the heavenly dwelling place of God. The high priest is no longer a sinful human being. He is the Man without sin, the Word made flesh. The sacrifice is no longer one of farm animals. The sacrifice is God's greatest gift to us, His only Son.

These things are hard to understand. I keep falling back on hymns for inspiration because the point is not solve some sort of theological puzzle, but to worship God.

1 Once, only once, and once for all,
his precious life he gave;

before the cross our spirits fall,
and own it strong to save.

2 'One offering, single and complete,'
with lips and hearts we say;
but what he never can repeat
he shows forth day by day.

3 For, as the priest of Aaron's line
within the holiest stood,
and sprinkled all the mercy-shrine
with sacrificial blood;

4 so he who once atonement wrought,
our Priest of endless power,
presents himself for those he bought
in that dark noontide hour.

5 His manhood pleads where
now it lives
on heaven's eternal throne,
and where in mystic rite he gives
its presence to his own.

6 And so we show thy death, O Lord,
till thou again appear;
and feel, when we approach thy board,
we have an altar here.

7 All glory to the Father be,
all glory to the Son,
all glory, Holy Ghost, to thee,
while endless ages run.

November 29th

Hebrews 9 vv 15-17

Yesterday's hymn is a Communion hymn. From as far back as the second century, the words of prophecy in Malachi 1¹¹ have been taken by many Christians to refer to the Eucharist or Holy Communion. *For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.* This offering is memorial of Christ & a thanksgiving to God. It is a promise of His Presence with us and a foretaste of the world to come. It is an expression of our unity with Him & with one another. It is an invitation to us to offer our lives to Him *our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice.* We may think of ourselves as in Him & He in us as we celebrate with Him and affirm His Sacrifice of Himself which effects the New Testament or Covenant.

Likewise after supper he took the Cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins:

November 30th (Advent Sunday)

Hebrews 9 vv 18-28

After Moses had received the Ten Commandments on Mt Sinai (Exodus 24), he proclaimed God's Law to the people. God would be their God. They would be His people. The people undertook to keep God's Law. They sacrificed animals to the LORD. Moses collected the sacrificial blood in a basin. Half was sprinkled on the altar of God, half on the people. This was the blood of the Covenant between God & the Israelites. *Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.* The Blood of Christ is the Blood of the new Covenant or Testament, which is reaffirmed in every service of Holy Communion as we *look for him to appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

December 1st

Hebrews 10 vv 1-4

The Old Testament Law is not an evil thing. Far from it; it is the gift of God. It cannot, however, save human beings. Only God Himself can do that. The Law (summarised in the commands to love) is a guide as to how we ought to live. It prompts our consciences. We are judged by comparison with it, which, in itself brings two temptations. One is the temptation to despair because we can never attain perfection in the sight of God by our efforts. The other is that we may have too inflated a belief in our own virtue & look down on other people whom we judge to be less good than we are.

December 2nd

Hebrews 10 vv 5-10

These verses are based on Psalm 40. The point in the psalm is that God does not require sacrifice for sin. He would prefer it if we didn't sin at all. If we do sin, what He requires is sincere repentance. A sincerely penitent sinner would offer a sacrifice under the OT dispensation. What God does not want is a hypocrite who has no intention of repentance offering a sacrifice as though he were sincere. Our Epistle takes this further. The life of Jesus is pleasing to God because He is without sin.

Nevertheless, He comes into the world – in accordance with God's eternal plan, to offer Himself as a pure sacrifice which is effective eternally for the sins of the whole world.

1 There is a green hill far away,
outside a city wall,
where the dear Lord was
crucified,
who died to save us all.
2 We may not know, we cannot
tell
what pains He had to bear,
but we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.
3 He died that we might be
forgiv'n,
He died to make us good,

that we might go at last to
heav'n,
saved by His precious blood.
4 There was no other good
enough
to pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
of heav'n, and let us in.
5 O dearly, dearly has He loved,
and we must love Him too,
and trust in His redeeming
blood,
and try His works to do

December 3rd

Hebrews 10 vv 11-14

God promises victory to the Messiah, the King of Israel. Christ, the Messiah, has conquered sin, the world & the devil on the Cross. The victory has been one. The devil is cast out of heaven, but he continues to make mischief on earth. How do we overcome the power of the Evil One? We follow the example of Jesus, the faithful Martyr, the One Who bears witness to the truth of God even to the point of self-sacrificial death. *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you* (James 4^{7&8}).

December 4th

Hebrews 10 vv 15-23

Jesus has dealt with sin once and for all. We repent & believe, we are baptized, we are a new creation. He have access to God through Jesus Christ, our only Mediator & Advocate. We are cleansed in Christ. We are a new creation. There is no more sacrifice for sin because there is no need. We address God: *ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* That being so, we must take care not to lapse back into sin. Forgiveness is priceless, not cheap.

December 5th

Hebrews 10 v24

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.

I have been worshipping recently in a Church of England Church which uses the Roman Catholic rite. This experience has made me think about a number of issues. In some respects, I prefer the C of E form of service, but, in others, I believe that the RC rite expresses our faith rather better. One example of this is where we explicitly pray for one another, the people who are met together in Church on that particular occasion. We ask for one another's prayers as we seek forgiveness of our sins and for the grace to offer a worthy sacrifice to God. There is a danger of concentrating too much on *my Communion, my relationship with God*. That is very important, but we are members of one another. We are God's family. As God is our Father & Jesus is our Brother, all Christians are our brothers & sisters and we ought all to support one another on life's journey.

December 6th (St Nicholas)

Hebrews 10 v25

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

The recipients of this epistle were expecting persecution. So it isn't surprising that some of them might have thought of lying low and not meeting together with other Christians for worship. Why have so many of our fellow citizens effectively forsaken the assembling of themselves together? There is a big price to pay for this. We receive the grace we need in order to live out our Christian lives when we assemble & meet together to enjoy fellowship with our Christian brothers & sisters, to pray together, to hear His Word, to participate in the Holy Sacrament. The next generation pick up the faith through belonging to a church. The fact that we give a higher priority to worship than we do to other aspects of our life (such as earning a living, recreation or fitting in with a culture which is indifferent or hostile to religion) bears witness to our neighbours that the Good News of Jesus really matters, matters more than everything else.

December 7th (Advent 2, Bible Sunday)

Hebrews 10 vv 26-31

Our salvation is priceless, not cheap. What ought we to expect if we casually disregard Jesus & all that He has done for us? The recipients of this epistle were facing real physical danger & they were warned not to walk away from God's great love because they were afraid. What excuse could we possibly make for wilfully disobeying God's Commandments? And how would we expect God to respond if we were to treat the terrible Death which Jesus died for us as of something cheap & of little account to us?

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

December 8th

Hebrews 10 vv 32-39

Occasionally, you meet people who were once great Christians. They were faithful worshippers. They were active in the life of the Church. They were always eager to join in when anything needed to be done. They were glad to share their faith with others. But there has come a time when they are much less zealous, more indifferent, hostile even. I'm not talking about people who can't do as much as they used to because of a growing family, a more demanding job, or simply because they are getting older. I'm thinking of those who have become disillusioned. Sometimes, this is the fault of the Church. The vicar has been too demanding. They have endured too much unfair criticism from the congregation. They are disappointed in the institution of the Church, locally or nationally. Or maybe events in their lives or in the wider world have shaken their faith. Perhaps they are experiencing intellectual doubts about the truth of the Gospel. The first readers of this Epistle are told to think back to challenges in the past. They have faced trouble before and come through it. They had stuck by the writer of the Epistle (Paul?) when he was in bonds and they have suffered at the hands of hostile forces. And God brought them through. He did so in the past. He can and will save us in the future. So they should draw on their experience of God's grace in adversity and trust Him for the present & the future. And so should we.

December 9th

Hebrews 11¹

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith will vanish into sight; love in heav'n will shine more bright;
hope be emptied in delight; therefore give us love.

The greatest of the three – *faith, hope & charity* – is charity or love. Love alone is eternal. God is love. Faith and hope, however, are very real. They sustain us on our journey through this world to the heavenly city. Faith is an emotion. It is a conviction. Sometimes we feel faith. Sometimes we don't. Faith is based in our knowledge of God – both personal and intellectual. We know God personally. We know about Him, Who He is, what He has done, what He promises, what He requires of us. We know in the part, but that partial knowledge is authentic and on what we know of God our faith is founded.

December 10th

Hebrews 11²

For by it the elders obtained a good report.

To some extent, we rely on our own experience of God to bring us through life's trials & tribulations. We also rely on the support and experience of our fellow Christians. We also have a rich heritage – all those people who before us have found the strength they need to live their lives through faith. You might say that it is by faith that they have remained faithful. You might also that the faithfulness of God makes it possible for us to have faith in Him & to live faithful lives.

December 11th

Hebrews 11³

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

God created everything which exists out of nothing. He did so through His Word, Jesus. We know this through faith because we have His Holy Spirit.

December 12th

Hebrews 11⁴

The reason why Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God & Cain's wasn't, was that Abel offered his in faith. Abel's blood was therefore that of an innocent martyr.

Abel's blood for vengeance
pleaded to the skies,

but the blood of Jesus
for our pardon cries.

December 13th

Hebrews 11 vv 5&6

The story of Enoch is in Genesis 5 vv 21-24. The thing about Enoch is that he walked with God. I take that in two senses. In this life Enoch walked in God's way. At the end of his life on earth, Enoch was taken directly to heaven. Elijah was taken up into heaven in a flaming chariot (II Kings 2). Many Christians believe that the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed directly into heaven when her earthly pilgrimage was over. To believe in God, to have faith, is (obviously to believe that God exists. It is also to believe that He is a just judge. He is active in the world. All of us, every one of us, *in him live, and move, and have our being*. Enoch knew that. Elijah knew that. The Blessed Virgin knew that.

December 14th (Advent 3)

Hebrews 11vv 7-40

In these verses, we read how, by the grace of God, through faith in Him, a great variety of people achieved great things in God's cause. Today's collect refers to St John the Baptist, a man of great faith, who is in some ways a bridge between the Old & New Testaments. The prayer is that the ministers God sends to the Church today will prepare us for Christ's Second Coming to judge both the quick and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end. The saints of the Old Testament, of the New Testament & of Christians throughout the ages long for the coming of Christ's Kingdom. So v16: *But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

O LORD Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

1 Light's abode, celestial Salem,
vision whence true peace doth
spring,
brighter than the heart can
fancy,
mansion of the highest King;
O how glorious are the praises

which of thee the prophets
sing!

2 There for ever and for ever
alleluia is outpoured;
for unending, for unbroken,
is the feast-day of the Lord;

all is pure and all is holy
that within thy walls is stored.

3 There no cloud or passing
vapour
dims the brightness of the air;
endless noon-day, glorious
noon-day,
from the Sun of suns is there;
there no night brings rest from
labour,
for unknown are toil and care.

4 O how glorious and
resplendent,
fragile body, shalt thou be,
when endued with so much
beauty,
full of health and strong and
free,

December 15th

Hebrews 12 vv 1-3

It's hard to think how one could add to these words. They are so beautiful & what they express is so wonderful. We have the example & the fellowship of all those who have gone before us in faith. Some of them have suffered much. Many have accomplished great things. It has all been through faith in God. They have set us an example. They have shown us the Way. They are with us on our earthly pilgrimage – the Communion of saints. But so much more than all these great men and women of old, Jesus Himself. He has shown us the Way. He has taught us the Way. He is our companion* on the Way. He is the Way, the Truth & the Life.
PTO.

full of vigour, full of pleasure
that shall last eternally.

5 Now with gladness, now with
courage,
bear the burden on thee laid,
that hereafter these thy labours
may with endless gifts be paid;
and in everlasting glory
thou with brightness be
arrayed.

6 Laud and honour to the
Father,
laud and honour to the Son,
laud and honour to the Spirit,
ever Three and ever One,
consubstantial, co-eternal,
while unending ages run.

Thou Art The Way: To Thee
Alone
From Sin And Death We Flee;
And He Who Would The Father
Seek
Must Seek Him, Lord, By Thee.

Thou Art The Truth: Thy Word
Alone
True Wisdom Can Impart;
Thou Only Canst Inform The
Mind,
And Purify The Heart.

Thou Art The Life: The Rending
Tomb
Proclaims Thy Conquering
Arm,
And Those Who Put Their Trust
In Thee
Not Death Nor Hell Shall Harm.

Thou Art The Way, The Truth,
The Life;
Grant Us That Way To Know,
That Truth To Keep, That Life
To Win,
Whose Joys Eternal Flow.

December 16th

Hebrews 12 vv 4-13

The worst of the persecution which the recipients of this letter are fearing has not yet happened. If & when it does, the writer teaches them to regard it as a chastisement from God. There is nothing which happens outside God's Providence. So there must be a reason for whatever happens. We are taught that we shall become better people through what we endure. A hard lesson, but we can't believe that God allows these things to happen without a purpose & all God's purposes are good.

December 17th

Hebrews 12 v14

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.
Now that I no longer have to lead worship, I can spend the time before the service begins in prayer & meditation, rather than in checking that everything is where I need it & the books are open at the right page & putting on my vestments. Kneeling in a consecrated building, where God's people are gathering together for worship, in anticipation of meeting Christ in Christian fellowship, in prayer, in Word & Sacrament, I seek to be mindful of the disposition required by Scriptures such as today's verse. Sometimes I find myself saying the Collect for Purity (which doesn't come in the service where I now worship) and saying it more meditatively perhaps than when I say it out loud, leading a congregation in saying it together. Try it.

ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

* In its original sense a companion is someone with whom we eat bread. Jesus is the Bread of Life. The Bread of Holy Communion is His Body. We, the Church, are His Body. You are what you eat.

December 18th

Hebrews 12 vv 15-29

It must have been amazing to have been one of the Israelites set free from Egyptian slavery in the time of Moses. There were the ten plagues inflicted on their masters, then liberation, then the pursuit by the Egyptian army & the passage to safety through the Red Sea. They were fed on the manna, bread from heaven, and drank water from the rock. They stood before Mt Sinai when Moses experienced the Theophany, God's manifestation of Himself, a vision of heaven and the revelation of God's Law. How wonderful, how awful, how inspiring. Yet it says of Moses and of all the OT saints, *And these all, having received a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect ...some better thing for us.* The inference is obvious.

December 19th

Hebrews 13v1

Let brotherly love continue.

Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Love ought to characterise all our relationships – beginning with our Christian brothers & sisters & flowing out into the wide world which God so loved that He sent His only begotten Son. In Advent we think about being prepared for Christmas & being prepared for the Second Coming of our Lord. Are we ready to receive Him? Are there people with whom we are not in love & charity? If so, what can we do about that? Thoughtfully praying the *Collect for Purity* would be a start.

December 20th

Hebrews 13 vv 2-6

So how does brotherly love play out in practice? Hospitality. The reference here may be to hospitality to travelling ministers & missionaries, but hospitality is a good general principle. It was Abraham who entertained travellers who turned out to be angels, manifestations of God even (Genesis 18).

Some Christians regard the celibate life as somehow holier than marriage. Some Christians have believed in *free love*. The truth is that marriage is *an honourable estate, instituted of God*. Some people are called to be celibate, some to marry. Neither is superior to the other. It is a matter of living the life God wants you personally to live. What

some people call *free love* is not, however, an option for a Christian. *Marriage was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.*

The life of love is the life of faith – not to be greedy, selfish or materialistic, but to trust God to supply our needs and to be thankful for all His gifts.

These are just examples. We have to work out for ourselves how the principle of love applies to every aspect of our lives.

December 21st (Advent 4)

Hebrews 13 vv 7-15

Jesus Christ yesterday, and today and forever.

He is what it is all about. The task of Church leaders is to glorify Him, to build up the Church in His likeness and to proclaim Him to the world. All we Christians are united in this task. We don't need the Temple sacrifices. *We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.* We do not belong to that old dispensation. We are the people of the New Testament (of Jesus Who is both a light to lighten the Gentiles & the glory of God's people Israel). Our altar is the heavenly altar on which our High Priest sacrifices Himself once for the sins of the whole world. It is the offering in which we participate when we break bread together in the Holy Communion. There is no shame in us in following Him, despised though He is by the world. *For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*[†]

O LORD, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

[†] From as far back as the second century, the words of prophecy in Malachi 1¹¹ have been taken by many Christians to refer to the Eucharist or Holy Communion. *For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.*

December 22nd

Hebrews 13 v16

But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

We've seen that in the Old Testament, God is much more concerned that people should live good lives than that they should offer sacrifice for their sins. It is in fact only those who sincerely seek to live good lives who are able to offer sacrifices acceptable to God. In the New Testament, we understand that God has set us free from sin by Christ's once & for all perfect sacrifice of Himself on the Cross for the sins of the whole world. Set free from sin, by Christ's sacrifice of Himself, we *shew forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days.*

I've long wondered what *to communicate* means in this verse. The word is *κοινωνία*, which means *fellowship* or *communion* as in the *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship* (prayerbook) or *communion* (King James Bible) of the Holy Ghost or Spirit. We speak of *Holy Communion* in which we have fellowship with God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit & with one another within the *communion of saints*. We sing about our *mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won*, which follows from our union even here on earth with God, the Three in One.

In Hebrews 13¹⁶, *κοινωνία* incorporates concepts such as generosity, fellow feeling & altruism., which all follow from who we are as the people of God.

December 23rd

Hebrews 13 vv 17-25

We clergy are responsible, accountable for the people given into our charge. We need your prayers. We need your practical support. Above all, we need the grace of God. While it is not made clear in the letter who the author is, it is clearly a personal letter. The author – whether Paul or one of his close companions – writes as a member of a community who care for one another. He is obviously a great biblical teacher & preacher. He writes from the heart as well as from the head. *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the*

everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

December 24th The Last Day of Advent

Philippians 4 vv 4-7

Christmas Eve, what kind of a day will it be for you? Perhaps you will have already begun your Christmas celebrations. Or you may spend the day in joyful anticipation of the morrow. It might be a fraught day of last minute arrangements and travel. Perhaps for some it will be a sad day, full of memories of happier Christmases past, or an occasion when you will feel left out of what everybody else seems to be happy about. Today's reading is the Prayer Book Epistle for the last Sunday of Advent. Consider where true joys are to be found and rejoice. God is not far away. His Kingdom is imminent. Behave wisely as the Christian you are. Thank God for the blessings you receive from Him. Ask Him faithfully for everything you need. Rest in His peace.

O LORD, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end.

December 25th (Christmas Day)

John 1 vv 1-14

How I enjoy reading the Christmas Gospel at carol services & at Holy Communion, especially on Christmas Day itself! *Jesus Christ yesterday, and today and forever.* He is what it is all about. God reveals Himself to us. He shares our mortal existence. He undergoes the trials that we undergo. He shares our joys and our sadness. He understands us. He knows us. He provides for our every need. He lives and dies with us. He loves us not despite our failings; He loves us as the people we are. He endured *such contradiction of sinners against Himself*, and yet those who receive Him are received into His family as His brothers & sisters to share with Him the gift of eternal life.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

December 26th (St Stephen)

Acts 7 vv 55-60

The early days of the Church were very exciting. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. They preached the Gospel. Thousands believed and were baptised. They met daily for worship & fellowship. They shared their goods. Miracles were wrought. Even when they were persecuted by the chief priests, they regarded themselves as honoured to suffer for the Name of Christ. But the early Christians were human. Ananias & Sapphira claimed to have shared their wealth when they hadn't. Disputes broke out about fair shares. The apostles appointed seven deacons, one of whom was Stephen, to administer the rations. Stephen, however, proved to be a great preacher. Opponents in the synagogue made false accusations against him. He responded by demonstrating to the Jewish leaders how the Old Testament (the Bible to the people of those times) proclaims Jesus. In today's lesson we read what came next - his vision of Christ in heaven, his stoning & his committing himself to God & prayer for his persecutors (Just like Jesus on the Cross). Saul, of course, is a witness to Stephen's stoning. In time, he will become Paul the apostle, preach the faith far more widely than Stephen had the opportunity to do, and also die a martyr's death.

Grant, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

December 27th (St John)

I John vv 1-10

The apostle John was privileged to be a companion of Jesus. He knew Jesus personally in the flesh. He heard the teaching & saw the miracles. He was a witness to the Crucifixion & the Resurrection. Jesus entrusted His Mother to John's care. He bears witness, however, to the Jesus Whom he knows so that all his hearers and readers may share his knowledge. It is eternal life to know God & Jesus Christ Whom He has sent. To belong to the fellowship of the Church is to have fellowship with John & with all the apostles, with every Christian who has ever lived. It is to have fellowship with God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

John writes so that our joy might be full. As faithful Christians, we walk in the Light. We are not yet perfect. We deceive ourselves if we believe that we are, but God is faithful. He forgives and cleanses us. He will keep us in His love. *When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

MERCIFUL Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

December 28th (Christmas 1)

Matthew 1 vv 18-25

We seem to hear in our Christmas services and Nativity plays more of St Luke's account of the Birth of Christ than of St Matthew's, which tells the story from a different perspective. Initially, the focus is on Joseph, rather than Mary. Joseph cannot understand how it is that Mary is with child, but he doesn't want to put her to public shame. God sends an angel to speak to him in a dream and to allay his fear. The angel reminds Joseph that he is *of the house and lineage of David*. The Messiah is expected to be born of David's line. Joseph must have known this, but he obviously hadn't considered that his own little family might be the one in which the miracle would take place. Pause for thought. We know that God can do anything. Do we ever pause to consider that He might use you or me to do His work?

The Birth of the Child fulfils the prophecies. It is true that the Hebrew of Isaiah 7 in the Old Testament could simply mean that a young woman would bear a child who would be a sign of what God was doing in the prophet's own time. The Greek translation of the OT, however, specifically says *virgin*, as does the Latin. Matthew & Luke know that the prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary – a truth which we affirm daily in our Creeds. The child is given two very significant names. *Jesus* is a Greek version of the Hebrew *Joshua*. *JO* are the first two letters of the Name of God which is so sacred that it is not spoken. The *shua* part comes from the Hebrew Word to save. The LORD saves the world in Jesus. The Name Jesus is also to be spoken with reverence. *Emmanuel* means *God with us*. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...*

December 29th

Psalm 139 vv 1-24

There is a lot of comfort in this psalm. God knows everything about us. He loves us intimately. Every detail of our lives comes under His notice. He knows what we are doing. He knows what we say. He even knows our thoughts – our fears & our hopes. Of course, this also means that He knows all about our sins. But He loves us anyway. If we confess our sins, He will forgive us our sins & cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There is nowhere we can go that God is not with us. Nothing can happen to us of which He is unaware. He is always with us & He will not allow us to be tried beyond what He knows we can bear. We don't have to be afraid.

He knew us before we were born. He knows us in all eternity. He has made us the people that we are. God's Wisdom is infinite.

Vv 19-22 are difficult. If we love God, it might seem to make sense to hate those who oppose Him. If we love our fellow Christians, our family, our friends, our nation even, it might seem to make sense to hate those who persecute the Church, do harm to our family or friends, make war on our nation. But that's not what Jesus did. Hate is the very opposite of what He taught us to do. But I can understand why good people might feel like the psalmist. I remember kneeling in prayer in Church in Brixton at Easter 1980 thinking about these verses with reference to those whose teachings seem to undermine our faith. I was too judgmental & too lacking in generosity, but I can see the point.

December 30th

Psalm 144 vv 1-15

Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed by life. We may be facing big problems and unable to see the solutions. We feel inadequate. Yet God is both our strength & our defence. The psalmist wonders why God bothers about us, but He does. He is infinitely greater than we are, yet He cares for each one of us – to the extent of giving His Son to die for us. He is infinitely greater than we are & He supplies us with the strength & wisdom to face up to every challenge which comes our way – *to do all those good works which He has prepared for us to walk in.*

Whatever the opposition might do or say, God is mightier. He sustains us & enables us to perform our duties. If we as individuals, as a Church, as a nation live by trust in God, then He will bring us through all our troubles and we shall live in His peace for ever.

December 31st

Psalm 150 vv 1-6

O PRAISE God in his holiness : praise him in the firmament of his power. 2. Praise him in his noble acts : praise him according to his excellent greatness. 3. Praise him in the sound of the trumpet : praise him upon the lute and harp. 4. Praise him in the cymbals and dances : praise him upon the strings and pipe. 5. Praise him upon the well-tuned cymbals : praise him upon the loud cymbals. 6. Let every thing that hath breath : praise the Lord.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

Let's end the old year with praise & bring in the new year in that same spirit of worship. We've thought about many deep things in this quarter's Bible notes. We've no doubt had many experiences over the past year – some good, some difficult. We've had the opportunity to thank God for the great benefits which we have received at His hands. We've relied on Him for all those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul. We've confessed our sins to the end that we might obtain forgiveness of the same by His infinite goodness and mercy. We've heard & read His holy Word. I hope too that we have experienced Christian fellowship & participated in the Holy Sacrament.

We've found a lot of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) cylinders around the churchyard lately. Youngsters inhale the gas for the buzz. There's nothing new in that: alcohol, nicotine, pot, glue, cocaine, heroin, LSD, a whole cocktail of more or less harmful substances, across probably all human cultures. Human beings will look anywhere – wealth, power, the worship of idols, violence, illicit sex - anywhere but in the right place to find satisfaction for their souls.

Man's chief end is to glorify God & enjoy Him for ever.

Happy New Year.

