

COLLECT

O Lord Jesus Christ,
 who at your first coming sent your
 messenger
 to prepare your way before you:
 grant that the ministers and stewards of
 your mysteries
 may likewise so prepare and make
 ready your way
 by turning the hearts of the disobedient
 to the wisdom of the just,
 that at your second coming to judge
 the world
 we may be found an acceptable people
 in your sight;
 for you are alive and reign with the
 Father
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 61:1-4. 8-11

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The servant of the LORD said: The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and

as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

PSALM OR CANTICLE

Either **Psalm 126**

R *The Lord has done great things for us [and we are glad indeed].*

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
 then were we like those who dream.
 Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
 and our tongue with shouts of joy. **R**

Then they said among the nations,
 "The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us,
 and we are glad indeed. **R**

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
 like the watercourses of the Negev.
 Those who sowed with tears
 will reap with songs of joy.
 Those who go out weeping, carrying
 the seed,
 will come again with joy, shouldering
 their sheaves. **R**

Or **Luke 1:46b-55**

R *My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
 My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
 For he has looked with favour on his lowly servant;
 from this day all generations will call me blessed.

The Almighty has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name. **R**

He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.
 He has shown the strength of his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in their conceit. **R**

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones
 and has lifted up the lowly.
 He has filled the hungry with good things
 and the rich he has sent away empty. **R**

He has come to the help of his servant, Israel,
 for he has remembered his promise of mercy.

The promise he made to our forebears:
 to Abraham and his children for ever. **R**

SECOND READING

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians.

My brothers and sisters, rejoice always,
 pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

GOSPEL John 1:6-8. 19-28

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

POST COMMUNION

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts;
 kindle in us the fire of your Spirit
 that when your Christ comes again
 we may shine as lights before his face;
 who is alive and reigns now and for ever.