



The Conversion of St Paul

The Acts of the Apostles clearly describes the conversion of the anti-Christian zealot, Saul, to become the apostle of Christ, Paul. But we need to remember how this was merely a beginning: Saul took some time to become Paul and some time to begin to understand that his call to preach the saving power of Jesus, the Son of God—to Jew and to Gentile—was to become his life's mission. For example, Paul says in his Letter to the Church in Galatia, 'God set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace ... Three years after (his conversion on the Road to Damascus), I went up to Jerusalem.' The preparation for this moment of his conversion was his whole life.

This feast has been celebrated since the sixth century but became universal by the twelfth century.

Monday 21 January 2021

- All the Bible readings come from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
- The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration have been included at the end rather than in situ because many following the service will be in isolation and unable to celebrate the sacrament.
- The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Take my life](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

We were once dead through the trespasses and sins in which we lived,
but now we are alive together with Christ.

Through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father,
to whom we humbly confess our sins.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,

**Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.**

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for the Conversion of St Paul

Almighty God,
who caused the light of the gospel
to shine throughout the world
through the preaching of your servant Saint Paul:
grant that we who celebrate his wonderful conversion
may follow him in bearing witness to your truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Jeremiah

The word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'

Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy"; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.' *Jeremiah 1:4-10*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' All who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those

who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah. *Acts 9:1-22*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Do not be afraid

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Peter said to Jesus, 'We have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.' *Matthew 19:27-30*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Today, although we are celebrating the conversion of St Paul, we are still in the Church season of Epiphany. The word 'epiphany' comes from the Greek word *epiphanein*, which means 'reveal', and it's the time when we remember that God's love in Jesus was revealed to the whole world. The beginning of the revealing process can be seen in the Acts of the Apostles, where the disciples start to spread the good news of Jesus, and there can be no more dramatic reveal than the light-bulb moment of Saul at Damascus!

We have come to use the word 'conversion' in many different contexts. Loft conversions, converting to veganism, converting rugby tries, I didn't like *Game of Thrones* at first but now I'm a convert ...

The thing to remember about true conversions, though, is that they are always transformative. They change one thing into something else. The loft becomes a storeroom, or a bedroom, or a playroom. Saul, who persecuted Christians and was

involved in the stoning of St Stephen, becomes the evangelist and teacher Paul. Humankind is transformed into the children of God. Conversion equals change, always.

Conversion is not always dramatic. St Paul's was—flashing lights, loud voices, temporary blindness, oh my! We could think that conversion has to be big, and important, and only people with a prominent purpose undergo a conversion. But that's not so—we are converts, too. Our conversion might be coming to church with a friend for a baptism or wedding, and coming back to learn more because we were interested. Or we might have been going to church all our lives. Or we might have gone to church as a child, lapsed, and come back to God as we matured. Or we might have come to faith intellectually. Or we might have had a dramatic, life-changing event.

There are many different ways to become converted to Christ, possibly as many ways as there are people. Because each real conversion to Christ is personal. We can see this in the readings—the message to Saul was one that would have meant nothing to someone else, someone who hadn't done what Saul had done. And our conversion, our change, is personal and relevant only to us.

The final, and perhaps the most important, thing to remember about conversion is that it demands effort and upheaval, and often discomfort or danger (think about Paul's later persecution, imprisonment and death at the hands of the Romans). The conversion moment in itself is just the beginning, the call from God to come to Him, to become like Him. It's up to the individual whether they allow themselves to be converted or not. Jeremiah could have chosen not to be a prophet, Saul could have chosen not to continue to Damascus. And the smaller, less celebrated characters in the story could have done things differently. The men with Saul could have left him instead of accompanying him to Damascus. Ananias could have said he was not having anything to do with a persecutor of believers, the disciples in the Gospel could have decided not to leave everything they had for Jesus. But they all did it, because God called them and they trusted Him, so they obeyed, no matter what the consequences might be.

Conversion is not static—because if it is, what's the point? If you come to a point where you think you know enough, you are no longer trying to get closer to God. We are all being converted, day after day, trying to be more like Jesus, loving and compassionate. We would all describe ourselves as practicing Christians—for me, that means that if I keep trying, one day I'll be good at it.

Our conversion is in the trying, getting closer to God as we grow in love and understanding, prayer and trust, whatever the uncertain future brings. Keep practising!

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Encouraged by our fellowship with all the saints,

let us make our prayers to the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Father, your Son called men and women to leave the past behind
them and to follow him as his disciples in the way of the cross. Look
with mercy upon those whom he calls today, marks with the cross
and makes his disciples within the Church ...

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Your Son told his disciples not to be afraid, and at Easter breathed
on them his gift of peace. Look with mercy upon the world into
which he sent them out, and give it that peace for which it longs ...

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Your Son formed around him a company who were no longer servants but friends, and he called all those who obeyed him his brother and sister and mother. Look with mercy upon our families and our friends and upon the communities in which we share ...

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Your Son sent out disciples to preach and to heal the sick. Look with mercy on all those who yearn to hear the good news of salvation, and renew among your people the gifts of healing ...

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Your Son promised to those who followed him that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and would share the banquet of the kingdom. According to your promise, look with mercy on those who have walked with Christ in this life and now have passed through death ...

Lord, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Almighty God,
you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone:
so join us together in unity of spirit by their doctrine,
that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Let the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [Father hear the prayer we offer](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May Christ who called Paul to his service,
and to preach the good news to the world,
strengthen you to witness to his grace and love.
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 [I the Lord of sea and sky](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good,
our duty and our joy,
at all times and in all places
to give you thanks and praise,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
For on this day he called to his service
the blasphemer and persecutor of your Church.
Saul, who had resisted your grace,
became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.
Because he was faithful and true in his ministry,
you made him an example of patient service,
to instruct in the way of eternal life
all those who heard his preaching and believed your word.
Now, therefore, he who became your chosen instrument
~for the salvation of the nations
has made us also eager to proclaim your mercy,
and sing in union with all the powers of heaven
the joyful hymn of your praise:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with St Paul and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.
Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All **We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.**

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Almighty God,
who on the day of Pentecost
sent your Holy Spirit to the apostles
with the wind from heaven and in tongues of flame,
filling them with joy and boldness to preach the gospel:
by the power of the same Spirit
strengthen us to witness to your truth
and to draw everyone to the fire of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

All **Almighty God,**
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.