

**Tuesday 7 December 2021**

# St Ambrose



Ambrose was born in Trier in 339 into an aristocratic family. He was precocious: he became governor of northern Italy with his headquarters in Milan by the age of 35.

Ambrose was soon known and respected by all. Therefore, although not yet baptised, he was urged to accept the role of bishop after trying to bring peace to the Christian community in Milan. In context, the conflict between orthodoxy and those following the Arian heresy was reaching a stage when both sides sought the election of its own man as bishop. The Christian populace took up the cry, 'Ambrose for bishop'. He finally accepted and was baptised and consecrated.

Ambrose proved his worth. He became a teacher and preacher of great renown. He promoted the divinity of Christ as being at the centre of Christian faith. He wrote hymns which gave a clear and comprehensible understanding of orthodox teaching, ensuring that what the people prayed was what they believed, and vice versa.

Ambrose came up against the imperial powers and, with the support of the whole community, stood firm against the interference of the state in church and faith matters.

Ambrose died on this day in the year 397.

**Sermon** © Nicola Williams.

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**Bible readings** © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

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 Christ is made the sure foundation** [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

### 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.**

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

**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 St Ambrose**

God of hosts,  
who called Ambrose from the governor's throne  
to be a bishop in your Church  
and an intrepid champion of your faithful people:  
mercifully grant that, as he did not fear to rebuke rulers,  
so we, with like courage,  
may contend for the faith we have received;  
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 Isaiah

You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Yes, all who are incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'

*Isaiah 41:9b-13*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

## Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. *2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN 2 Adoramus** ('I love you') [\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

## Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

**All Glory to you O Lord.**

A dispute also arose among the disciples as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

*Luke 22:24-30*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**All Praise to you O Christ.**

## Sermon

When I began my research on Ambrose of Milan, I found pages and pages of information about his role in the clashes that occurred throughout his lifetime: between

different versions of Christianity, between different Christian practices, between Pagans and Arians, and between Orthodoxy and so many other brands of faith. But it didn't stop there: Ambrose lived through clashes between church and state, between local customs and different areas and between political parties, and just about anyone who held a belief or had an opinion aired them. Many big ideas and personalities were emerging.

Ambrose was just one voice among a thousand voices, but he was popular and, despite his own hesitancy, found himself Bishop of Milan in the year 374 at the age of 34 years old. How comforting then must the words of Isaiah in today's reading have been ...

*You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

Ambrose faced many challenges stoically and he worked determinedly to try to encourage the Church to grow in independence, in structure and by focusing upon worship for the ages to come. Ambrose could be said to have built the foundations of the Church we know and love now.

There is so much that we *do* know about Ambrose and his life but much of it lies in the details of his leadership and political standpoint. Understanding all of this, and the society in which he lived, is important but, amid all of the information out there, there was little about the man himself. We know where he went, who he came up against and what he did but who was Ambrose the man? And what did he do that would interest me?

It seems that Ambrose is a man of whom many legends abound. However, it is written that he was a genuinely spiritual man who spoke about his faith and defended his faith to all, no matter their place within society. Being born an aristocrat it was perhaps unusual that, as soon as he became Bishop of Milan, he began an ascetic life: giving to the poor; selling all of his land to do so, serving those in need and speaking to encourage all in the faith. He was untrained in theology having studied the law and he was never baptised! He did however baptise St Augustine of Hippo whom he inspired! He must have had some influence and charisma to have inspired this great Christian figure.

Ambrose was the first recorded man of high office and social standing to take on the role of Bishop in the West and he was equally at home preaching to the poor as he was advising Emperors.

He must have been a man with immense talent—we would say that he had great 'people skills'—and these were put to good use; we can be sure that he was a man

of great diplomatic influence. Ambrose is credited with being the first Doctor of the Church. His faith was influenced by Arianism but was also fundamentally Nicene and his doctrine formed the backbone of Western Christianity.

Unusually for the time, Ambrose was keen to ensure that the Church rise above the politics of Rome—that it would stand for far more and that the tarnish of political corruption and power would be removed. He influenced his clergy to travel and to adapt their habits to suit the place they were visiting—this was a radical change as the norm would require clergy to follow the rites and regulations of their own habit wherever they worshipped and lived. He is credited as proposing a new way of living which we have reduced to ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do.’ Ambrose was seemingly a diplomat born and bred!

So then in Ambrose we have a man born into the elite of Roman society, scholarly, charismatic, and passionate about his faith; a man who knew the finer things of life and who seemingly fell into the role of Bishop but then, when the inevitable caught up with him, Ambrose more than rose to the challenge. He gave away so much of his accumulated wealth and in doing so, gave away political privilege, only to win much of it back when people realised that he was serving the needy.

Some claim that Ambrose was actually the first socialist—living though he was in the fourth century! In today’s Gospel Luke is talking to us about social standing. He points to the radical question posed by Jesus ...

For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?

Unusually, this question is pre-empted by the actual answer ...

... rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest,  
and the leader like one who serves.

Ambrose took this on board and lived his Bishopric striving to serve, educate, influence and guide the Western Church forward and away from the corruption of greed, power and politics.

Jesus calls each and every one of us to serve, rather than to be served. We are called to share what we have, not just our money but our everything: our food and water, our shelter, our faith, our compassion, our knowledge and understanding of God and of Jesus Christ as Lord. We must share celebration and grief just as we must share this planet and its resources. In fact, we all share the same air, the same earth, and the same water: nothing is mine or yours but ours. The recent COP Summit highlighted this fact with stark warning!

But this is what Ambrose represents. In becoming Bishop of Milan, he used every skill he had, and leaned on God to guide him in his mission to separate church from state and to make the world around him more equal. He did what he

could to ease suffering and to ease the Church in the West to a better understanding of what it should be.

Today's Collect offers these words in prayer ...

... mercifully grant that, as [Ambrose] did not fear to rebuke rulers, so we, with like courage, may contend for the faith we have received.

Ambrose challenges us to contend for the faith we have received. In our modern world this can mean many things: we might face keeping churches open in spite of dwindling congregations, we might face cynicism and even anger in people who do not agree that Church has a role to play in today's society, or we might just have to think about how 'openly Christian' we live our lives—do our work colleagues know about our faith or is it something we keep hidden or keep quiet about?

Ambrose also challenges us to live our lives in a way that supports others. Would I, if faced with the choice, give up my inherited wealth? Would I give up my home and my job and share what I have with others? Do I actually put in the effort to try to make the world a more equal place to live? When/if I vote, do I think carefully about how I can impact others, or do I simply put a cross in a box? Am I willing to challenge those in power when I see them commit injustice? Ambrose did all of this and more. He might not always have had his way, but he used what he had to try to make a difference. He put in place the foundations of our church, taking on powerful enemies and making influential allies. Ambrose was a complicated personality living in a complicated society, but he was absolutely what St Paul calls in today's reading from 2 Corinthians an *'Ambassador for Christ'* ...

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God

So, would I like the man Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, if I were to meet him face to face? Would I be interested in who he was as much as what he did? I think I would, I hope that I would, because as interesting as he is, Ambrose is a character who challenges us to live to serve and that is not always an easy thing to do. History teaches us many things about how to live a good life. Other people have made the mistakes so that we can learn, but what history does not teach us is what it *truly feels like* to serve, to humble ourselves before others and to put their needs first. Christ calls us, above all else, to love and to serve. Ambrose did it and so must we, but we too have the words of Isaiah to comfort us ...

You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God.



I hope that when people look back on my life, they think that I was also an interesting person. I know that I will never achieve anything as great as Ambrose did but, with the words of Isiah ringing in my ears, I just hope that I am brave enough to try!

## 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

Lord Jesus Christ,  
I approach your banquet table in fear and trembling,  
for I am a sinner,  
and dare not rely on my own worth,  
but only on your goodness and mercy.  
I am defiled by many sins in body and soul,  
and by my unguarded thoughts and words.  
Gracious God of majesty and awe,  
I seek your protection,  
I look for your healing.  
Poor troubled sinner that I am,

I appeal to you, the fountain of all mercy.  
I cannot bear your judgment,  
but I trust in your salvation.  
Lord, I show my wounds to you and uncover my shame before you.  
I know my sins are many and great,  
and they fill me with fear,  
but I hope in your mercies,  
for they cannot be numbered.  
Lord Jesus Christ, eternal king, God and man,  
crucified for mankind,  
look upon me with mercy and hear my prayer,  
for I trust in you.  
Have mercy on me,  
full of sorrow and sin,  
for the depth of your compassion never ends.  
Praise to you, saving sacrifice,  
offered on the wood of the cross for me and for all mankind.  
Praise to the noble and precious blood,  
flowing from the wounds of the my crucified Lord Jesus Christ and washing away  
the sins of the whole world.  
Remember, Lord your creature,  
whom you have redeemed with your blood;  
I repent my sins,  
and I long to put right what I have done. Merciful Father, take away all my  
offenses and sins;  
purify me in body and soul,  
and make me worthy to taste the holy of holies.  
May your body and blood,  
which I intend to receive, although I am unworthy,  
be for me the remission of my sins,  
the washing away of my guilt,  
the end of my evil thoughts,  
and the rebirth of my better instincts.  
May it incite me to do the works pleasing to you and profitable to my health in  
body and soul,  
and be a firm defence against the wiles of my enemies. Amen. *St Ambrose*

Merciful Father,

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

## **The peace**

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

**All** And also with you.

**HYMN 3 Like a shepherd**

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

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

## **The Dismissal**

May Christ who makes saints of sinners,  
who has transformed those we remember today,  
raise and strengthen you that you may transform the world;  
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 Come down O love divine** [\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

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, our duty and our joy,  
always and everywhere to give you thanks,  
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
And now we give thanks, most gracious God,  
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses  
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.  
The glorious company of apostles praise you.  
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.  
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.  
We, your holy Church, acclaim you.  
In communion with angels and archangels,  
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,  
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,  
for ever praising you and saying:

**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 Ambrose 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**

God of truth,  
whose Wisdom set her table  
and invited us to eat the bread and drink the wine  
of the kingdom:  
help us to lay aside all foolishness  
and to live and walk in the way of insight,  
that we may come with your servant Ambrose  
to the eternal feast of heaven;  
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.