

ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
WORSHIP SERVICE
10:30 AM 26TH JANUARY 2025
REV DR ZOLTAN BIRO LEADING AND PREACHING
WWW.ABBEYBAPTISTCHURCH.ORG.UK
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Welcome –

Theme: ANTIOCH: THE CHURCH THAT ROCKED THE WORLD

Invocation

*Blessed is the person who delights in the law of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.*

*They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.*

*Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do. (Psalm 1)*

Opening Prayer

*Loving God,
you are the ground of our being and the river of life;
you both steady our roots and pull them to the living waters.*

*You are like the sunlight inviting us to grow taller
and like the breeze rustling our leaves.*

*You are with us through hard seasons of summer heat,
and in the nights when winter's frost ice the landscape
your love warms and sustains us.*

You are everything to us.

*O let our gratitude be great, let our praise be plentiful,
let our worship be wonder-full!*

Through Christ Jesus your ever-living Son. Amen!

MP 1227:

*The splendour of a King,
Clothed in Majesty
Let all the earth rejoice,
All the earth rejoice.
He wraps Himself in light
And darkness tries to hide,
And trembles at His voice
And trembles at His voice.*

*How great is our God, sing with me:
how great is our God
And all will see how great,
How great is our God.*

*Age to age, He stands,
And time is in His hands;
Beginning and the end,
Beginning and the end.
The Godhead, three in one,
Father, Spirit, Son,
The Lion and the Lamb, the lion
And the Lamb.*

*Name above all names,
Worthy of all praise;
My heart will sing:
How great is our God.
Name above all names,
Worthy of all praise;
My heart will sing:
How great is our God.*

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Call to Worship

*I tell you this: it is a wonderful thing when members of the family
live together in love and peace.*

They shall be like trees planted beside flowing rivers.

*May the church be one, just as Christ and God are one,
that Christ may be glorified in us.*

***They shall yield good fruit in its season,
and their leaf shall never wither.***

*The grace, mercy and peace, of the Lord Jesus,
be with you all.*

And also with You. Amen

MP 1265:

Come, set Your rule and reign

In our hearts again,

Increase in us, we pray,

Unveil why we're made.

Come, set our hearts ablaze with hope

Like wildfire in our very souls.

Holy Spirit, come invade us now.

We are Your church,

We need Your power in us.

We seek Your kingdom first,

We hunger and we thirst,

Refuse to waste our lives,

For You're our joy and prize.

To see the captive hearts released,

The hurt, the sick, the poor at peace;

We lay down our lives for Heaven's cause.

We are Your church,

We pray: 'revive this earth.'

Build Your kingdom here,

Let the darkness fear;

Show Your mighty hand,

Heal our streets and land.

Set Your church on fire,

Win this nation back;

*Change the atmosphere,
Build Your kingdom here, we pray.*

*Unleash Your kingdom's power,
Reaching the near and far,
No force of Hell can stop
Your beauty changing hearts.
You made us for much more than this,
Awake the kingdom seed in us,
Fill us with the strength and love of Christ,
We are Your church,
We are the hope on earth.*

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Family time

In in many parts of the world people are still oppressed due to their race, ethnicity or religion, and only 60 years ago even in certain places in America people of colour were mistreated. For example, shops had special counters for blacks, or on a bus coloured people had to give up their seats for whites. In 1955, in Montgomery Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat for a white person and was arrested. She was a well-respected member of a Black Church whose minister was Martin Luther King Jr., when the church leaders heard what happened they gathered to respond to Rosa's arrest. They didn't have much money, power, or resources. But what they did have was faith, vision, and unity. From that small gathering, a movement was born, and they decided to boycott the bus company, which meant that black people were encouraged to stop using busses. The problem for the bus company was that most of the passengers were coloured people, so they started losing money, so they lobbied the government to stop discrimination against black people.

This action started a movement that transformed not only the United States but also inspire justice movements around the globe—including the collapse of the Apartheid in South Africa.

(There will be an offering taken during the following song, and after the song the children will leave us for their own groups)

MP 1100:

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord,
Open the eyes of my heart.*

*I want to see you,
I want to see you.
Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.
Open the eyes of my heart,
I want to see you,
I want to see you.*

*To see you high and lifted up,
Shining in the light of Your glory.
Pour out your power and love,
As we sing, 'holy, holy, holy.'*

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord...

To see you high and lifted up...

*Holy, holy, holy,
Holy, holy, holy,
Holy, holy, holy,
I want to see you.*

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*Readings: Acts 11:19-30
Acts 12:25-13:3*

Sermon

Antioch: A Church that rocked the World

History has shown us time and time again that small, determined communities can change the world. The Church at Antioch was such a community. From a humble beginning in a multicultural city, they became a beacon of faith, love, and mission, transforming the ancient world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This morning, as we reflect on their story, I want us to ask: What would it look like if we fully embraced the same faith, vision, and unity? Could we too change the world?

The Church in Antioch holds a special place in the history of Christianity. It was the spiritual home to many prominent biblical figures such as Barnabas, Paul, Mark the Gospel writer, and influential early church fathers some of you may heard of, like Ignatius and Chrysostom. It was the birthplace of foreign mission; it was here where the followers of Jesus were called Christians and this community was the first to raise the question about the

necessity of the circumcision of the Gentile converts. I am not exaggerating when I say that the church in Antioch actually rocked the ancient world.

But what made this church so impactful? What set it apart from others? And most importantly, how can this early church inspire us to live as the body of Christ in the world today? This morning, I'd like us to reflect on four characteristics of the Church at Antioch that can challenge and encourage us.

1. Antioch was a welcoming community

Antioch was no ordinary city. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, with a population of around 500,000. Situated at the crossroads of trade routes, it was a melting pot of cultures, languages, and ethnicities. Greeks, Romans, Jews, North Africans and others lived side by side, creating a dynamic, cosmopolitan atmosphere.

When the Christians who fled persecution in Jerusalem arrived in Antioch, they initially preached the Gospel only to Jews. After all, at this point in history, Christianity was still considered a faction of Judaism. But something unique happened in Antioch. In this multicultural city, the boundaries of tradition began to fade. The Gospel began to spread not only to Jews but also to Gentiles.

The believers in Antioch broke barriers. They recognised that the Good News of Jesus Christ was for all people, regardless of nationality or background. This openness reflected the heart of God, who calls people from every tribe, tongue, and nation into His kingdom. Reading is as diverse as Antioch was. The communities here are filled with people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures. Like the believers in Antioch, we are called to welcome others into our midst. Are we willing to reach beyond our comfort zones and embrace people who are different from us? Can we be a church that reflects the inclusive love of Christ?

2. Antioch believers were faith-filled

The believers in Antioch didn't just talk about their faith—they lived it. And people noticed. Acts 11:26 tells us that it was in Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians. The name "Christ-ian" was given to them by outsiders as a term of ridicule or even insult. It was a way of saying, "They are people from the Christ party."

But what was meant as mockery became a badge of honour. Why? Because their lives reflected the character of Christ. In 1 Peter 4:13 early Christians are advised to be proud if they are mocked for being recognisably Christ-ian. "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

Basically, they were so distinct in their love, humility, and faithfulness that the people of Antioch couldn't help but take notice. But, what do people see when they look at us? Does our love for one another, our integrity, and our faithfulness make them recognise Jesus in us? Or put it differently, if you were to be accused that you are a Christian, when they cross-examine or review your life, would they find enough evidence to convict you? Or would they dismiss the case based on insufficient evidence?

3. Antioch had a humble leadership

The leadership of the Church at Antioch was unique. Acts 13:1 tells us that the church had a diverse, team-based leadership made up of prophets and teachers. Among them were Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene who are grouped together as prophets while Manaen (who had been brought up with king Herod), and Saul (later known as apostle Paul) were the teachers.

What stands out about this team? Firstly, it was diverse. We know that Barnabas was a Levite, he was trained to lead worship in the Temple of Jerusalem, he was well versed in liturgy and worship, Simeon was a black person probably of African descent, some people think that he was the same person who carried the cross of Jesus on Good Friday, in which case he was first converted to Judaism before converting to Christianity. Lucius was from Cyrene (modern-day Libya), Manaen had ties to the aristocracy and Saul was trained as a Biblical Scholar. The church valued these people not for their background or status, but for their spiritual gifts and commitment to Christ.

Secondly, this leadership team worked together humbly. They recognised that no single person owned all the gifts necessary for ministry. Prophets and teachers worked side by side, each contributing their unique strengths. Prophets focused on pastoral care and spiritual direction (foretelling as well as forthtelling), while teachers were devoted to explaining Old Testament connections and implications.

In our church, we must value the gifts of all members and embrace them all. Ministry is not about individuals building their own platforms but about people working together for the glory of God. If we want to be inspired by the Church in Antioch, we should also strive to foster a culture of humility and teamwork in our churches.

4. Antioch was a generous fellowship

Generosity permeated everything the Church in Antioch did. It was their hallmark. When a famine was predicted by the prophet Agabus, the believers in Antioch responded by sending aid to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28-30). They didn't wait to be asked; they gave willingly and sacrificially to meet the needs of others.

We shouldn't be surprised by this, we are informed early on that one of their leaders Barnabas was leading by example in this department, he sold a piece of his land in Cyprus and gave the money to the apostles in Jerusalem.

Also, later in Acts 13, we see their generosity in the way they sent out Barnabas and Saul for their missionary journey. The church didn't hold them back. They could have said: "Lord, we have a lot going on in Antioch we can't afford to lose two of our leaders."... But they did not do that... They prayed for them, laid hands on them, and sent them out with their full support.

Generosity is not just about money—it's about our time, resources, and willingness to serve others. Are we willing to give sacrificially to meet the needs of those around us? Are we willing to send out and support those whom God calls to go? A generous church is a church that looks beyond her own needs and makes a difference in the world.

I would like to finish with another story, which you may have heard before about the young boy who walking along a beach that was covered with starfish, stranded by the tide. One by one, he picked them up and threw them back into the sea.

A man approached him and said, "You can't possibly save all these starfish. There are thousands here. What difference can you make?"

The boy smiled, picked up another starfish, and tossed it into the water. "It made a difference to that one," he said.

The Church at Antioch could have looked at the challenges of their time and thought, "We're too small to make a difference. The world is too big, and the problems are too great." But they didn't. They simply acted in faith, welcoming one person at a time, teaching one person at a time, helping one person at a time. And God multiplied their efforts until they changed the ancient world.

We may feel small or inadequate to make a difference. But when we step out in faith, like the believers in Antioch or that young boy on the beach, God takes what we offer and multiplies it.

So, let's not be discouraged by the size of the task. Let's trust God, step out in faith, and believe He can make a difference through us, and we too, may become a church that rocks the world. Amen.

Prayer:

Gracious Lord,

Thank You for speaking to us today through Your Word. As we leave this place, may

the example of the Church at Antioch inspire us to live boldly for You. Help us to be welcoming to all, unwavering in our faith, humble in our leadership, and generous in our giving. Fill us with Your Spirit so that our lives may reflect Your love and power to the world. May we be a church that makes a difference, not for our glory but for Yours. Strengthen us to walk in unity and to act in faith, trusting that You can do more than we could ever imagine.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Response: The Lord's Prayer YOU ARE INVITED TO PRAY IN YOUR OWN LANGUAGE

***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and 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 and ever. Amen.***

MP 1267:

*Come, people of the Risen King,
Who delight to bring Him praise
Come all, and tune your hearts to sing
To the Morning Star of grace.
From the shifting shadows of the earth
We will lift our eyes to Him,
Where steady arms of mercy reach
To gather children in.*

*Rejoice, rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!
One heart, one voice; O Church of Christ, rejoice!*

*Come, those whose joy is morning sun,
And those weeping through the night.
Come, those who tell of battles won,
And those struggling in the fight.
For His perfect love will never change
And His mercies never cease,*

*But follow us through all our days
With the certain hope of peace.*

*Come, young and old from every land,
Men and women of the faith.*

*Come, those with full or empty hands,
Find the riches of His grace.*

Over all the world His people sing -

Shore to shore we hear them call

The Truth that cries through every age:

"Our God is all in all"!

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Prayer of Intercession – *Benna Fung & Ernest Chong*

Dear Lord, we pray for peace and resolution in the conflict between Israel and Gaza. May the ceasefire bring an end to violence, protect innocent lives. Give hope for the safe and immediate release of all hostages and pave the way for meaningful dialogue and lasting peace.

We lift up the UK government to You, asking for your guidance and wisdom in their administration. Grant them with the ability to govern with a deep sense of responsibility for the welfare of all people, the needs of the vulnerable and fostering unity across the nation.

Dear Lord, we come before you to pray for an end to the wildfires in California. We ask for Your mercy and the flames be swiftly brought under control, People affected find strength and support during this difficult time. In the wake of the earthquake in Taiwan, May God's unwavering love and strength uphold the people of Taiwan.

We pray for the Church to be united in spirit, bound together in harmony and love. Strengthen the Church to be a beacon of peace, compassion, and truth. May we walk in Your ways and grow in faith, supporting one another in unity as one body in Christ. We pray for Zoltan and his family and the members of Abbey Baptist Church as we seek to discern God's will for the future Ministry of this church.

As the Lunar New Year is approaching next week, instead of relying on luck and fortune, may hearts be strengthened by faith, kindness and find assurance of the unchanging, unshakable blessings of God. In this New Year, may everyone find a home in God's refuge and Grace. May these promises bring you peace, hope and joy in the year of Snake.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

BP&W 572: (Tune: Cwm Rhondda)

God of grace and God of glory,

On your people pour your power;

Crown your ancient Church's story;

Bring her bud to glorious flower.

Grant us wisdom,

Grant us courage,

For the facing of this hour.

See the hosts of evil round us

Scorn your Christ, attack His ways!

Fears and doubts too long have bound us;

Free our hearts to work and praise.

Grant us wisdom,

Grant us courage,

For the living of these days.

Heal your children's warring madness;

Bend our pride to your control;

Shame our wanton, selfish gladness,

Rich in things and poor in soul.

Grant us wisdom,

Grant us courage,

Lest we miss your kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation

To the evils we deplore;

Let the search for your salvation

Be our glory ever more.

Grant us wisdom,

Grant us courage,

Serving your whom we adore.

H. E. FOSDICK (1878-1969) ALTD.

Final Blessing

In the name of the God of abundant life, I dare to bless you! **Amen!**

That in the seasons of plenty you will thrive and grow.

That in the seasons of drought you will consolidate your strength.

I bless you! **Amen!**

That you will delight in the warm sun of God shining upon you.

That you will delight in the cold rain of God falling on you.

I bless you! **Amen!**

That you will blossom to the glory of God
and make the world a more fragrant place.

I bless you! **Amen!**

That you will give shelter to those who seek refuge from storm or fierce heat.

That you may never forget whose tree you really are and whose life you share.

I bless you! **Amen!**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

**The love of God and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with us all now
and for evermore. Amen**

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Church Information:

TODAY

Zoltan is preaching with a view to becoming the next Minister of Abbey Baptist Church. After the service, there will be a Question and Answer Session in the Sanctuary. Everyone is invited to attend.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

The Leadership Course Session 6:

Tuesday 4th February 2025 – 2.30 pm in person in the Brookside room.
Friday 7th February 2025 – 7.30 pm on Zoom – please. Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3952055548?pwd=Vw1pXF00QfM9Qt6DBCDDb_mRdFAadQ.1&omn=88603759703
Meeting ID: 395 205 5548 Passcode: LT

Baptismal Service: The next baptismal service will be on Sunday February 2nd and another one is being planned for March. If you would like to be baptised and/or become a Church Member please speak to Simon, Jill or Celia (the Pastoral Team).

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please scan the QR code to pay:

