

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

ADVENT 4

19th December



Elizabeth greets Mary

- Lauren Wright Pittman

WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

We come to the Sunday before Christmas, which we mark with gratefulness and delight for the gift of love. We hear of the news that God's Christ will be born to Mary. This is both shocking news and cause for joy and jubilation – which Mary shares with her cousin Elizabeth.

We are invited to be people who, like Mary, wonder about the life of God coming to birth in surprising ways and unexpected places. This is the pattern for us as we long for the life of God to come to us.

*'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.*

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES

Come living Word of God
Speak to us of your divine life.

Come divine source of grace and truth,
Fill all the world with your never-ending fullness
Fill us with your love that the world may be healed.

the fourth Advent candle is lit

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Come living Word of God, sow in us seeds of your fullness and healing love.

Prayer

God of grace,
your eternal Word took flesh among us
when Mary placed her life
at the service of your will.
Prepare our hearts for his coming again;
keep us steadfast in hope

and faithful in service,
that we may receive the coming of his kingdom,
for the sake of Jesus Christ, the ruler of all,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The prophet Micah 5. 2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
 who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
 from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
 to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
 in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
 to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.

Psalm 80 1-7

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
 you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
 and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts,
 how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears,
 and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us the scorn of our neighbours;
 our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved.

The Gospel according to Luke 1. 26 – 53

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was

much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.



The Annunciation ~ Fra Angelico, San Marco Florence

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Reflecting

Mary does what so many young, single women, who find themselves pregnant, have to do; hurry away to a relative, far away. Certainly this happened in the past; maybe not so much now. Luke tells us that Mary goes with haste after receiving the news from the angel. The pall of shame that the unwed, young mother would bring on her father's household and reputation would be too much. Away you go! Out of sight; out of mind.

But Mary stands in a tradition of faithful, assertive women who find the hand of God in their circumstances; circumstances which others would consider to be shameful and deserving of punishment. We should not forget that at the time of this story, the law permitted, indeed called for, the stoning of such a woman. But here in the midst of this threatening, repressive atmosphere Mary utters her hymn of praise, which we still utter, emulating her defiance and hopefulness.

My sense is that in the Protestant church we have to a great extent discounted Mary because Roman Catholics placed, what we thought, was a too great an emphasis on her. I can recall from childhood a kind of disdain for what has come to be called "Mary worship". Jesus alone was enough for us!

But like too many things as a result of the Reformations dating from the 16th Century, we put Mary as a figure of devotion away, out of sight. Mary was simply a sort of passive but necessary receptacle for the birthing of Jesus. But we have discounted her and continue to do so at our own loss. As we affirm that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human, we might look to the influences, the forces, the traditions which made him so fully human. The prime influence in Jesus' life, certainly that scripture gives us, is Mary. It is within her salty womb that Jesus grows. But it is also within the crucible of family that Jesus is formed, with the influence of cousins like Zechariah and Elizabeth, who can recognise the presence of the life of God in their vitals – the child leapt within me. This is a couple who are not crippled by shame but can see the life of God, even in the places that others consider to be beyond the pale. Some transformation has taken place in these people which enables them to abide in love, rather than fear. They have, of course, been visited by angels.

The Biblical greeting par excellence is: Fear not! It is what the messengers of God always say when they greet the human protagonist: Fear not!

'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.' When Zechariah is alone in the temple and is greeted by the angel, Luke tells us that when Zechariah sees him, he is terrified; *fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.* The shame of a pregnancy out of marriage, the shame of being childless are overcome with love as the angels bring greetings from God.

Last Saturday in The Age in the faith column there was a piece by Michael McGirr, the author of Doorways into Hope and Joy at Advent and Christmas, which some of us are dipping into again this Advent, delightful, playful, truly human prayers, opening doors of joy and hope for us. Michael was writing about angels. He writes:

I always thought that angels were the ones who looked after us. I can recall a time I was in hospital. On the night after my surgery, I fell over on my way to the bathroom. A nurse, whose name I never discovered, appeared from nowhere. It wasn't just that they were professional and saved me from embarrassment. It was that they spoke in a way that restored my peace and dignity. By daybreak they had finished work and I never saw them again.

That is my image of an angel; the person whose presence is beautiful and real but also beyond our grasp. Our community is slowly coming to appreciate the importance of such people.

I wonder who angels are? What they are really like. People have imaged them with wings for a long time. And maybe it is as though they wing their way to us, as though they come from somewhere else, from a place which is shaped by love rather than fear, by grace, rather than shame, by embrace, rather than exclusion. They are ones who see beneath the surface of things, into the possibility of the life of God present in what we may have been socialised to consider to be terrible circumstances. I think Michael is right when he suggests an angel is someone who restores peace and dignity. They restore us without any fuss, without any expectation that it's about them. They just do what they do, humbly, quietly, without the need to be acknowledged and awarded. We have all probably been touched by such a person and, in whatever it was that they did, they somehow reset the world for us – erased our fear, simply by their presence and some simple act.

While Mary carries new life within her, this new life could be a death sentence for her. Gabriel restores her dignity; and Mary sings a hymn of feminine defiance in an oppressive male world. Elizabeth welcomes her as an angel; a bearer of God and affirms the presence of God in this most vital of human moments.

Through Advent we are called to wait and be watchful for the coming of God. As we remember the historical birth of Jesus we also recognise that in his story there is an opening of our eyes to an eternal pattern in our temporal being; a breaking in of the immortal to our mortal realm. This birth was not just a one-off event a long time ago but a pattern that is eternal. And we are invited to be part of this eternal realm. And so, we make the Advent cry: Come, Lord Jesus!

Prayer – prepared by Mardie Townsend

A woman waits for the birth of her first child. She has no opportunity to prepare a welcoming place for this new life, as there is no room at the inn. Instead, her Son is born in a stable. We too would

wish to prepare for the coming of the Christ child, but so often we too find no room – no room in our busy pre-Christmas lives.

Creator God, we bring to you our prayers for your world.

You laboured and brought forth and called the fruit of your labour good: help us too to cherish your creation. May your new life be brought to birth in care for the earth, inspiring us and our country's leaders to act to ensure that your creation is protected for future generations.

Jesus, son of Mary, dwell in us.

Loving God, we bring to you our prayers for all in need.

At your birth there was no room for you and you took your place with the lowly and the poor: help us to find room in our hearts for the lonely and forgotten, the homeless and stateless, the sick and the dying, and those who grieve the loss of loved ones (including those known to us: Wilf Cordier, Una Croft, Marian Steinbergs, Judy Fergusson, Gwen Parish, Stan Opie, Dawn Richards). May your presence transform the grief, despair and pain of all in need, that they may come to know new dignity, comfort and hope.

Jesus, son of Mary, dwell in us.

Saviour God, we bring to you our prayers for your church.

You brought your church into being and commissioned us to bear your love to the world: help us, as individuals, as a congregation and as a denomination to remain faithful to our calling. May we recognise the stirrings of new life within, being open to your call to enter into new ministries and to step out in faith into new ventures, so that we can play our part in revealing the mystery of your coming and in proclaiming your glory in all the world.

Jesus, son of Mary, dwell in us.

Gracious God, we give thanks for your faithful people of every age, and especially for the trust and obedience of the virgin Mary.

You know that birth is a painful business, sometimes a fearful business; you know that giving birth calls for effort and single-mindedness; help us to give our attention to this coming birth. May we who wait for your coming open to you the dark, secret and selfish places of our lives, make a place for your transforming love and rejoice when we recognise your presence.

Jesus, son of Mary, dwell in us.

Our Father in heaven ...

We wait for the coming of Christ

In hope the universe waits:

God's purpose shall be revealed.

Limited by mortality,

yet destined for liberation,

in hope the universe waits:

God's purpose shall be revealed.

Groaning as if in childbirth,

sampling the fruits of God's harvest,

in hope the universe waits:

God's purpose shall be revealed.

Trusting in what is unseen,
believing the best is to come,
in hope the universe waits:
God's purpose shall be revealed.

In the hiddenness of a byre
where the Maker of All will be born,
in hope the universe waits
God's purpose shall be revealed.

Blessing

God the Father make you holy in his love;
God the Son enrich you with his grace;
God the Holy Spirit strengthen you with joy;
the Lord bless you and keep you in eternal life.

Amen.

In hope the universe waits: Cloth for the Cradle, Wild Goose Worship Group.

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NEWS AND NOTICES

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE

The Christmas Day service will be at **9am**.

- Remember we continue to have to check in via QR Code or manually record our presence.
- We now **do not** have to record our vaccination status.
- We are **not** required to wear masks indoors, although we request mask wearing during singing.

BOXING DAY – SUNDAY 26TH

Boxing Day falls on a Sunday this year so we have decided to hold an event in the park rather than a full church service two days in a row. Last year a dozen or so people enjoyed a Boxing Day lunch together and we want to repeat this simple, low-key opportunity to be together. This is also an opportunity to mark the conclusion of Rev. Deacon Pam White's ministry with us. There will be a few speeches and expressions of gratitude for Pam. We will also have a brief worship - a reading, a carol or two – a recognition that Christmas is a highlight of our church year. We hope you can join us.

Where: Allnutt Park rotunda, enter from either end of Beech St, off Wheatley Rd.

From: 11.30am till it's time to go. (Worship followed by acknowledgement of Pam's ministry will commence at 11.45 a.m.)

Bring: your own lunch and drink, a chair to sit on. If you don't have a chair, please let Dianne Richter know and we can ensure there are enough. We will provide trestles for food and drink.

Wet weather plan? If the weather threatens to be wet – or too hot (above 30 degrees) – we will retreat to the North Rd hall. Although the halls have now been stripped of all their contents, we can still be safe and comfortable there.

THE CHRISTMAS BOWL 2022

As we begin Advent and our movement toward Christmas, we make ourselves aware of the work of the Christmas Bowl of the Australian Council of Churches. This year again, through Act for Peace, the ACC will be working with conflict-traumatised Palestinians in Gaza, Sri Lankan refugees in India, victims of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, people in Ethiopia displaced by the civil war there and vulnerable families and communities in Indonesia. For the

past 70 years the ACC has invited Australians to partner with them in responding to the needs of some of the world's most vulnerable. We hope you can continue to support their important work again this year.

You can make a donation via Christmas Bowl envelopes which will be available at worship on Christmas Day or you can donate online by following [this link](#). Remember to search for Ormond Uniting Church so your gift can be added to our joint effort.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sharing God's love this Christmas

It's been 10 years since the civil war broke out in Syria with thousands of families still living in neighbouring countries like Jordan. The challenges refugees face no longer make front page news, and now COVID-19 has made life even harder. Through the Christmas Bowl, you are helping our local partner provide support for families, including food rations and hygiene kits, along with psychosocial care. **Please give today.**

CALL: 1800 025 101 VISIT: actforpeace.org.au/christmasbowl

The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188

COVID PROTOCOLS – effective 16th December

Many of the COVID restrictions we have been living under are now lifted. Here is a list of what we must do and we can do:

- Each week we will be required to check in with QR code or manually if we can't check in with a smartphone
- The number we can accommodate in the church is now unlimited.
- We are NOT required to wear masks indoors now, but we do recommend the wearing of masks while in church due to the easy transmission of the Omicron variation of the virus.
- Our Covid Marshalls are Lorraine Denniston, Marg Davis and Robyn Mulder who comprise the OUC COVID Team.

Need to know more or unsure what to do? Please contact Andrew Boyle (0409 869 009) or Pam White (0434 378 099). Printed worship resources will continue to be delivered to those who are not able to make it to worship.

REMEMBERING AND CELEBRATING OUR HALLS

Dotted through the latest edition of Pathfinder you'll find people's memories of how our halls have been used. Thank you to everyone who has contributed articles (Warwick, Heather, David, Elizabeth, Dot, Jan) and to Lorraine for several of the photos– we hope you enjoy them. May they inspire you to reflect on your own memories and perhaps send something for next month – written articles and photos welcome. We will also be including material on the website.

If you'd prefer to tell someone your story so we can write it down for you, please contact Dianne Richter (0413 750 089).

We have also set up an online option “Ormond Uniting Video Memories” where you can record your memories so we can create a video record. Here is the link:

<https://app.memento.com/ormond-uniting-video-memories/bo5dlK8Ap/record>

If you require assistance to record your memory, please contact Gary (0411116415) or garyrichter@yahoo.com.au. You don't need sophisticated recording equipment, just a smart phone or laptop with camera.

ARSC THANKS

On Thursday I delivered a lovely car boot full of groceries to the ASRC in Footscray and am passing on their most grateful thanks to you. Thank you to all who have contributed food – we know that this will make a big difference to the refugees living in our community.

If you are looking for a delicious gift for someone this Christmas, there will be lots of home made jams and chutneys available this Sunday (19th) for a small donation to the ASRC. If you are not able to make it to Church and would like some, please call Di Richter on 0413750089 – she is very happy to deliver them to you.

Thanks again for all your support for the refugees this year.

Brenda Grootendorst and Di Richter

CLIMATE CHANGE BANNER

The Climate Change Group thank all you folk who sent through captions and graphics for the Group to consider for the OUC Climate Change Banner. All the Banner contributions were great and a huge amount of thought and effort was evident. Thank you for contributing, we really appreciate it. The Group decided that Lisa Saffin's Banner caption was the one on which we would model the OUC display Banner. Congratulations Lisa. Lisa's 'prize' is a \$100 donation to the environmental cause she chooses. The Banner is now in the process of being printed by Flagworld (who produced our Asylum Seeker Banner) and we are hopeful it will be available and in place by Christmas ('fingers crossed!')

ROSTER for Christmas Day Sunday 25 December 2021

READING	Heather Baxter	
PRAYERS	David Northwood	
DOOR DUTY	Lorraine Denniston	Brenda Grootendorst
SOUND	Gary Richter	
MUSIC	Peter Hurley	
COUNTNG	Marg Davis	Brian Moore
FLOWERS	Jan Rose	Dot Rose
RESOURCES DELIVERY	Brenda Grootendorst	