

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



25 DECEMBER 2022

CHRISTMAS DAY



Source: Beach4Art

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.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all

And also with you

Acknowledgement of first peoples

From river to ocean, from campfire to hearth,
may the First People who have cared for this Land be blessed.
From breath to song, from step to dance,
may those who follow your ancient stories, guide us on the journey of living honourably in this place.
From greeting to Amen, from silence to chorus,
may our worship join with the voices of the First Peoples of this Land.

Advent Liturgy-Light The Christ Candle: *Annabelle (R1) & Evie (R2- and candle lighter)*

Reader 1: We are Christmas people.

Reader 2: We have heard the good news that a child has been born for us, a Son has been given to us, and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

People: We have seen God kindle hope, peace, joy and love in our lives and in our world.

Reader 1: The centre candle in our Advent wreath is the Christ candle. From this light, all good gifts come.

Reader 2: We light this candle remembering the One who is the Light of the world.

(Light all 4 Advent candles & the Christ candle)

Reader 1: Let us pray:

People: Holy One, you sent your son as a baby born in Bethlehem. Give us a strong sense of his birth among us, so that our lives reflect the warmth and wonder of this Christmas flame. Make your church a place that shines with the wonder of your love. Amen.

SONG: Candle of Hope (on Christmas Day)

1. The candle of hope we light in this hour
proclaims that the Lord is coming in power.
We wait for a future, now hidden from view,
when Christ in his glory will make all things new.
2. The candle of peace shines bright with God's plan;
the wolf will lie down and dwell with the lamb.
Our guns and our weapons, our hatred and war,
will give way to gardens that heal and restore.
3. The candle of joy reminds us to sing,
for God is at work to do a new thing.
The proud will be humbled; the lowly will rise.
God's kingdom is one of delight and surprise.
4. The candle of love tells what we are worth:
God loves us so much, God came to the earth!
An angel brought news of a child who would be
the one who would save us and set us all free.
5. The Christ candle's light that shines for us here
tells out the good news that God has come near!
God came, a poor baby, in one time and place,
to show all creation the wealth of God's grace.

Text prepared for the Presbyterian Church of Canada by the Rev. Mavis Currie, Knox Presbyterian Church, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada Gillette. All rights reserved. Song: The Candle of Hope.

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Call To Worship

So many voices, so many words,
so many messages and messengers;
So many images, so many ideas,
so many symbols and rituals;
So many paths, so many quests,
so many ways and practices;
all of which seek to speak of you, O God,
all of which seek to make you known.

But, at the perfect moment,
in the perfect pitch,
with the perfect resonance,
you spoke, and stilled all other sounds,
and in the silence, all voices,
and all ears
knew that the Final Word had been uttered.

And so, Christ, Word of God, speak to us again,
and transform us into echoes
of your perfect, beautiful, creative, compassionate, eternal, final,
Word.

Sacradise

HYMN TIS 304 O Come All Ye Faithful (v1,2,3 & 7)...

A Christmas Prayer

Let us pray
Day-breaking God, we come to meet you this morning.
We gather together around a baby in a manger, in a stable behind a small-town inn.
We gaze together upon a new-born infant fidgeting in sleep.

We hear the soothing hum of a mother,
the stalwart silence of a father,
the rustle of hay and the footfall of the cattle and the donkey,
the occasional flurry of wings in the rafters,
the shifting weight of all of us gathered, watching.

What are you dreaming as you squirm in sleep?
What world of possibility inhabits your dreams?
Are you dreaming a future for us?
Are you dreaming endless peace for a war-torn world?
Are you dreaming earth restored to balance?
Are you dreaming a banquet for the hungry?
Are you dreaming healing for our illnesses and relief for our pain?

Are you dreaming dignity for the devalued?
Are you dreaming work for the unemployed?
Are you dreaming restored life for the addicted?
Are you dreaming calm for the anxious?
Are you dreaming restoration for broken relationships?
Are you dreaming a world of love and respect, communication and forgiveness?
Are you dreaming a world of song and dance, art and colour, poetry and mystery, delight and awe?
What beautiful new world are you dreaming for us?

Now your eyes flicker and open.
Morning is upon us.

Day-breaking God, God of the awakened infant.
What dreams linger as you open your eyes from sleep?
We meet you in these wide-open still-focusing infant eyes.
We look into your eyes.
You look back at us.

What do you see?

Do you see your dreams?
Do you see the world in us waiting to be?
Do you see deep into us and meet your own reflection as the morning star rising, bright day breaking in our souls?

Peer into us with your infant eyes and let your day break in us.
Let healing dawn in our wounds.
Let comfort dawn in our afflictions.
Let honesty dawn in our half-truths.
Let forgiveness dawn in our bitterness.
Let compassion dawn in our indifference.
Let joy dawn in our sorrows.
Let courage dawn in our fears.
Let hope dawn in our despair.
Let dawn break as the song of the angels bursting forth to sing in our hearts.

Day-breaking God, peer into us with your infant eyes and let your day break in us.
Let us know your awesome LOVE rising within us and among us to create the world of your dreams.
May we welcome all your wonders, and dream with you, the wonders yet to be!
Amen.

The Christ child came and lived and died for you
In his name I declare to you our sins are forgiven and we are made new
Thanks be to God

Dr. Susan M. (Elli) Elliott

HYMN TIS 318 Away in a Manger...

Scripture

Your Word is a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path.

ISAIAH 9:2-11

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For, the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The Lord sent a word against Jacob, and it fell on Israel; and all the people knew it— Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria— but in pride and arrogance of heart they said: “The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place.” So the Lord raised adversaries against them, and stirred up their enemies,

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

LUKE 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and

Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

Unwrap the Package

Let us pray

I love this time of year. I love Christmas. It is a time of genuine joy and love. We have 5 grand-children and they certainly have been keenly anticipating this Christmas morning and unwrapping some packages.

It's all joy, happiness and wonder!

OR IS IT!?

Not everyone is of the same opinion. I read an article about Christmas, and it unwrapped a different package.

Let's unwrap that package

The article suggested that in this time of goodwill and celebration there is actually an increase in the number of

- domestic and family arguments at Christmas.
- and it is NOT a time of hope, peace, joy and love, but a time of increased tension and 'fights!'
- HmMMM!!!!
- I wondered about that?!

So, I did a bit of research and was surprised to find some confirmation of this thesis.

The stats suggest the Christmas Package looks a bit like this in our culture

- there is an increase in family rows, in many places
- there is an increase in tragedy on the roads
- there is blatant commercial exploration of the season, and
- there is increased alcoholic consumption resulting in increased loutish behavior!

***** hmmm, as I look around, some of you seem a little bewildered, maybe thinking, 'hang on Ron, this is not in the spirit of Christmas, not what I expected from a Christmas day reflection!' 'That's not my family!*****

Fair enough!

So, perhaps, we will leave that package wrapped for the moment – maybe come back to it in a little while.

Let me unpack another package for you – its content is strange!

When we unpack this package, it reveals an unhealthy romanticizing of the birth of Jesus.
(repeat)

The picture we normally expect of his birth, that has been espoused over many centuries, can be summed up as follows: SWEET BABY JESUS. SWEET BABY JESUS IN THE LOVELY MANGER!

Baby Jesus, born in a spotless beautiful crib or bassinet – surrounded by folk all dressed up – clean, awe-struck animals in attendance, halo like light surrounding his head – with all parties smiling! And so on and so forth!

Frankly, this scene is one that couldn't be any further from the likely truth of Jesus' actual birth, than the Christmas ugliness I referred to earlier, represents Christmas.

You see, you won't find such a romanticized view in the Christmas package, if you truly look closely. Such a culturally contrived compendium of Jesus, the Babe in the Manger, corrupts the authentic Christ child package, just as much as family fights and feuds, despoil the very heart of Christmas!

SOOOOOO - Let's think about how this Christ child was REALLY born – the real surprise package!

- By any standards, and especially by the standards of his time, Jesus was illegitimate – he was a bastard child – not a good look back then.
- He was born in appallingly abject conditions: cold, dark, stinking and highly unpleasant.
- Jesus' parents were 'nothings' in their culture. They were poor and could not even afford the most basic amenities for his birth.
- The Shepherds who came to see him were crooks; the dregs of society who came, not so much, full of wonder, as scared and bewildered, wondering how they could turn this weird event to their own advantage.

This is the real Jesus, Babe in the Manger, Christmas Package.

Not one about the special, the select, the fashionable, the cute, nor indeed, is it about the abnormal, corrupt and distorted view I shared earlier, associated with the Christmas event.

Neither of these polar opposites tell us about the heart of the baby Jesus package.

So, what is at the heart of 'the REAL Package?'

The HEART and the TRUTH of the Christ Package is that a very real, decidedly normal, and totally human child enters a very real, unsettlingly normal, and very human world. He comes into our midst, not as an OTHER – but fully, completely, and utterly as ONE OF US. Emmanuel!

Christianity lives or falls on this truth

Of course, He is the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour, but as Christians we affirm, in faith, what our rational brains will not let us affirm, namely, that this Saviour of the world is at once, both Son of God and Son of Man! That is, that baby borne in the food trough in Bethlehem 2000 years ago was and is TRULY 100% human.

So, baby Jesus enters the real world – the real world of human fights, the real world of plunder and war and rape and destruction (AND the real world of beauty and co-operation and compassion and working-it-all-out together.) AND the world of self-righteousness and pride, which seeks to manipulate the Babe into their own human controlled packages.

NO! The Jesus in the Christmas package IS the world's true destiny AND helps us to unpack our and the world's true destiny – true humanity.

But, nor is he a baby Harry Potter who waves his magic wand to rid the world of its many evil Voldermorts.

As he grows this child Jesus will mature into the fullness of humanity, where he stands in the midst of the many forces of evil and good in our world. He challenges them all, and all of us, with his love, so as, to prompt us all to realize and appreciate our true fullness of humanity.

He loves his sisters and brothers, even when they have nothing but hate for him, for others, for the world, and for themselves. He never stops loving, even those who couldn't 'give a toss' about him.

He also proclaims a gospel of undeserved gracious love and life, in the midst of all our self-righteousness, which proclaims a gospel of human achievement and pride, devoid of 'walking humbly with our God.'

Eventually he will die, young, because of his determined unwillingness to ever give up on that love, which is the very centre of his humanity and of our humanity, too. Out of that self-giving love, he seeks and desires nothing but love and wholeness for ALL and in ALL. He will even die for it.

No corrupt and destructive Christmas here, in the manger, nor a sloppy and romanticized, sweet baby Jesus, in the manger.

Rather:

- Jesus the babe was born, so that families (and nations and the whole world) might be reconciled in and through his love, rather than destroy each other with hate, violence, self-righteousness, pride and apathy.
- Jesus the babe, was born in poverty, in an animal shelter out the back, so that the poor and the hungry and the homeless might be no more.
- Jesus the babe was visited by wise and rich men who brought him expensive gifts, so that all of us who are rich (and wise!) might share and give generously so that all are able to have what they need.

- Jesus the babe, was borne in humble surrounds, so that he might challenge the self-sufficient pride and self-righteousness of humanity, and turn our prideful, and acquisitive ways to ways of humility, joy, peace, generosity and love.
- Jesus the babe, was born in simplicity so that we might all learn to live simply and sustainably in our home, mother earth.

Don't be trapped, year-long, by the trappings, corruptions or distractions of Christmas Day, rather let the 'real package' of the baby Jesus, invade and transform ALL of your daily living, always.

That's the real deal: the real package!

Have a great year unwrapping it!

Amen

Let us pray

Baby Jesus, in all our living, including our dying, fill us with your love every day, so that your Kingdom, may indeed come on earth, as it is in Heaven.

We pray in Jesus' name **Amen**

HYMN TIS 317 Love came down at Christmas...

Offering

This year the Christmas Bowl is supporting multiple Refugee causes. The entire loose offering from both the Christmas EVE and Christmas DAY service is going to the Christmas bowl appeal. If you wish to make a contribution please enclose your donation in the envelope which came with your worship resources and pass it on to the person who delivers the worship resources when it resumes again in early February 2023.

Prayers of the People – prepared by Warwick

Generous, loving God,
We know this story so well.
All the characters are familiar.
All the words are known by heart.
All the songs have been sung so many times.
We love this story and its comfortable, comforting familiarity.
We praise You for the wonder which come to us in the familiar.

At the centre of this story is the eternal God stepping into human history.
The All-Powerful One choosing to live in fragile flesh.
The Creator becoming a creature.

We praise You for the miracle of God becoming human.

Into the daily cycle of our lives
When all seems well
With us and with the world
When our yoke is easy
And the burden light;
We remember the people of Ukraine and the Russian soldiers who suffer the devastating effects of a political war in the harshest of winter and the loss of amenity and family and friends.

You break in unwrapped God
And scatter our complacency

Into the daily cycle of our lives
When we are comfortable
And at our ease
When the fire is lit
But eyes are closed
We remember those without a home, those without work, those without food, those without hope...

You break in vulnerable God
And challenge our dependency

You break into
Our daily prayers
Humble hearts
Lay souls bare
We remember those trapped by addiction, greed, power, pleasure, hatred, racism, violence and abuse, blindness to others needs.

You break in disturbing God
You break in

You break in

When defences are down
With an Angel's shout
Or the quietest sound
You challenge our distraction, smallness of vision, complacency and ignorance

You break in

You break in

And we change

And all things change

When you break in...

Circle us, Lord

Circle this nation with Christmas love and hope

Create a desire to listen to the Christmas message

Create a willingness to understand and respond

Create a need to reach out to the Christ Child,

as we pray now for those who we know, who are in great need...

(Silent prayer)

Circle us, Lord

Circle this world with the joy of your Salvation

Where there is sickness and disease bring healing

Where there is hunger and despair bring hope

Where there is torture and oppression bring release

Lord of creation, Lord of Salvation

Lord of the greatest gift of love given to the world,

May your love and presence continue to change us and your world to your glory.

Amen.

(Adapted from John Birch, Faith & Worship)

Lords' Prayer

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

and forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever,

Amen.

HYMN TIS 303 Hark the Herald Angels...

Sending

Beloved in Christ, go into your world to live in the very presence of Christ – right there, in the midst of it all!

We promise to live in the excitement of Emmanuel – God with us, right there, in the midst of it all - the excitement that transforms us and enlivens us, through his presence in our own lives and in all that exists in God's world.

Go forth now, to meet this God, the one God, the God of limitless love and grace, and in his name, and with his life and love within, serve and love all. **Amen.**

Blessing

May the grace of God inspire your transformation, the love of Jesus, fill your whole being, and the enlivening presence of the Spirit, sustain you. Christ is with us – **Hallelujah: Amen, Amen, Amen**

Word of Mission

This Christmas day and every day,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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Rev. Ronald Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-12.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-3.30pm

Phone: 0411 958 127

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

Website: www.ormondunitingchurch.org

NEWS & NOTICES