

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

Christmas Day 2021



The First Christmas ~ Jan Pienkowski

WORSHIP AT HOME

We come to Christmas Day and are, in quietness, invited to receive the news of the Christ child coming into the world. Luke tells us that Mary pondered all that happened around the birth of Jesus in her heart. She was a natural contemplative, watchful and receptive. Like her, we are invited to be watchful for the emerging of the life of God in and around us and to participate in the reign of God, ushered in in this one simple and humble birth.

May it be so.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT AND CHRIST CANDLES

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

Come divine source of our hope,
Fill all the world with your never-ending joy.
Grant to us your peace, the peace which passes understanding,
Fill us all with your love that the world may be healed.

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.

Isaiah 9

Come living Word of God,
be born in us, that we may become children of your divine life.

Prayer

You have given us a sign, O God:
The young woman with child.
Born in humility, raised in obscurity,
Nurtured by women and men of deep faith.
You have offered us yourself in the person of Jesus.
We give thanks for the mystery of your presence in him;
That he is sign for us of your love and your mercy.
Even in his new-born fragility he is sign for us of your reign
Of justice and love and mercy; still sign for us now as it was then.
And so, we rejoice and are thankful.

Come O God, our source and our end.
Like Mary, may your divine life be born in us
In those places of purity which lie deep within us.
May we lay ourselves open to your spirit.
Make your home with us, fill us with joy,
Heal our brokenness, make us whole through your life-giving love,
That we may dwell in peace.
All blessing to you eternal, wise and ever-present God. Amen

The Prophet Isaiah 52. 7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'
Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

Psalm 96

O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in holy splendour;
tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity.'
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the Lord;

for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

The letter to the Hebrews

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The Gospel according to Luke

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!'

Nativity ~ He Qi

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.



Reflecting

There is a clash of world's here in Luke's story of the birth of Jesus. One man, Caesar Augustus, orders a census in which everyone, at least in the Roman world, was to be counted. What a monumental task this must have been. And a baby is born in vulnerable circumstances; away from home, his parents not even able to afford decent accommodation.

Caesar is the bringer of the Pax Romana. All of Luke's hearers know what this looks like. Violent intervention, repressive reign, local needs subservient to the voracious needs of the empire, taxes imposed which fund the empire's wars in other places. In a version of imperial spin, this was what people were meant to be grateful for.

But Luke tells us a heavenly army appears to the shepherds to sing the good news of heaven:

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

Glory to God, not to Augustus, the god-man in Rome; and peace, unlike the one Rome brings. To the shepherds living in the cold on the margin, and to the new parents, roomed-up in the stable there is a message of heavenly peace.

The child is a sign for the ones whom God favours, that there is to be divine peace for them all. This child embodies the life of God, as the church continues to affirm and proclaim and celebrate. This child is a sign of the reign of the divine peace, available to those, who like the shepherds and Mary and Joseph can see; and participate in.

We are invited to participate and delight in this reign of the child born in humility and to be citizens of that reign. So, this day we are thankful and filled with delight that we can, with the shepherds glorifying and praising all our days.

Prayer

Gracious God
we acknowledge you present in all things
and present with us now: God with us.

In all the uncertainty we feel about our own lives and the turmoil of the world we acknowledge that your life infuses all things and that in spite of all that seems wrong we trust that you seek our peace.

In Jesus we have seen your face and in his word we hear of your loving-kindness for all the world. We seek your face and dare to utter our prayers in your presence.

In a world which does not seek peace but war. We pray for your peace.

Where the trenchant sense of entitlement of the wealthy is an affront to the poor of the earth. We pray for your justice.

Where news of war and of preparation for war is the daily diet of too many. We pray for your healing.

In a church which so often seems to have lost its way. We pray for repentance.

In our Australian community where the most vulnerable seem to have become pariahs of entrenched prejudice. We pray for compassion.

Where our affluence conceals the plight of the poor, the chronically ill and those who have no anchor in their lives. We pray that every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;

O God, we are told that Christmas is a time for family and for friends – but we are not so sure about that this sometimes. We hold before you the pain of our own journey –
the pain of Christmas without one we have loved for so long and so deeply,
the pain that there are some from whom we are estranged to whom we desire to be close and at peace,
– the pain of living which is sometimes too hard.
We admit our own sense of aloneness at this time of feigned togetherness.

Gracious God, we need your mercy and the courage of your spirit who seeks life and wholeness for us.

As Mary did, we also give ourselves into your hands. Be gracious to us O God and help us to live in the light of your love.

All blessing to you, holy God, source of life, Father, Son and Spirit. Amen

Our Father in heaven ...

Blessing

Come living Word of God:
Fill all the world with your never-ending joy.
Come living Word of God,
be born in us, that we may be children of your divine life.

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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.



A Pastoral Letter from Pam

25 December 2021

Dear Ormond Friends,

It's almost Christmas and my last few days to be among you. Thank you for having me, for much longer than any of us expected. Thank you for the things you have shared with me, for the things we have explored together, for the laughter and occasional sadness.

If you have a few moments of quietness, either before or after Christmas Day, you may like to contemplate what it might have been like to have been Mary, especially as her story is told in Luke's Gospel, 1:26-38.

You may ponder how she felt receiving the angel's news.

What might it have been like to be especially favoured by God? How does this favour appear in your own life?

Do you resonate with Gabriel's words that nothing is impossible with God?

Have you ever felt the need to do something that went against the expectations of your family or group?

You may care to take time for prayer that moves beyond words and allows space to enter into the mystery and transcendence of God in your life.

Then you may care to imagine you are holding the infant Jesus. He is so vulnerable as a new baby. How will you continue to nurture him in your life as it continues to unfold?

And how do you see him enriching your life?

I can't say goodbye without a little humour. This goes well with the awful

Bon - Bon jokes:

My kids laugh because they think I'm crazy.

I laugh because they don't know it's hereditary.

And a blessing:

May bright starlight illuminate your quest.

May wise people gift you from their treasure.

May you hear the wonder of the angels in the conversations of the shepherds.

May your trust be as convinced as Mary's and your faithfulness as sure as Joseph's.

May love enfold you as an infant's wrap, smile upon you in every endeavour and stretch out to uphold you in all that life brings.

May you know the strength of JOY.

The serenity of PEACE

The possibilities of HOPE

And the eternity of LOVE.

With my gratitude and love,

Pam