

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



17 DECEMBER 2023

ADVENT 3



Joy

WORSHIP AT HOME

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

Set aside 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. We join with them all.

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.

Focusing ...

From the splash of the stone the ripples move out, wider and wider until they touch the edges: all the edges, and some bounce back. Memories entered and trusted can ripple through our lives, to the edges and sometimes back, and in the ebb and flow memory nurtures hope, becomes living water – gifts of a loving and bountiful God. Thank you God!

Acknowledgement of Country: We come to meet this morning from all manner of places, and on the Country of diverse Clans and Nations of First Peoples', and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and commit ourselves afresh to the journey of justice and reconciliation.

Joining the scattered community

Here we begin another week, weaving together the fabric of our lives, in all their different textures and colours, their changing forms and flows.

Here we mark the things that have gone before and hope for newness to come.

Here we celebrate each other's place as one thread in the weaving and cherish the moments when the fabric of our lives become whole.

Focusing for worship

In hope the universe waits: for God's purposes to be revealed.

Limited by mortality, yet destined for liberation, in hope the universe waits: yet God's purposes shall be revealed.

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

In the hiddenness of a stall where the Maker of all will be born, in hope the universe waits: God's purposes are being revealed.

(Edited from: Cloth for the Cradle, Copyright © 1997 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G51 3UU, Scotland)

Song (Red Book - TiS) 152 Joyful, joyful, we adore you

Advent Candles - week 3 'JOY'

Voice 1: During Advent we progressively light four Advent candles over the four Sundays of the season leading up to the lighting of the Christ Candle on Christmas Day.

Voice 2: Perhaps you could consider following this practice at home, as well? Let's light the candle for the third Sunday of Advent – the Candle of JOY.

Voice 1: The prophets call, and an apostle writes to announce that joy comes from God.

Voice 2: *"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me... and has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,*

... to comfort all who mourn; ... to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning..." (Isaiah 61)

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice." (Philippians 4)

Voice 1: Grief, pain, and loss are inevitable. But woven into life is the joy of living in a universe that reflects God's beauty. Advent provides time to nurture joy in our lives and in the world God loves. Advent calls us to share with others the good news that comes into the world with the birth of Christ.

Voice 2: Holy are you, Source of all new life among us.

Jesus Christ comes as joy to the world.

Voice 2: We join with all creation and lift our hearts in joyful praise.

We light this candle to glow for joy.

(Light the Candles of HOPE, PEACE, and JOY)

Sing verse 1, 2 & 3 of CANDLE OF HOPE

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.

TIME FOR LISTENING – WORDS AND ACTIONS

Readings from the Bible (Robyn Mulder)

Your word O Lord is a lamp for our feet – a light for our path

As you listen to the readings this morning, in Isaiah, listen for what one commentator has called “the bouncing ‘I’”. Sometimes it means the speaking prophet. At other times it is God.

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11 – The Good News of Deliverance

61 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners,² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

⁸ For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my whole being shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Luke 1:39-55 - Mary and Elizabeth

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among

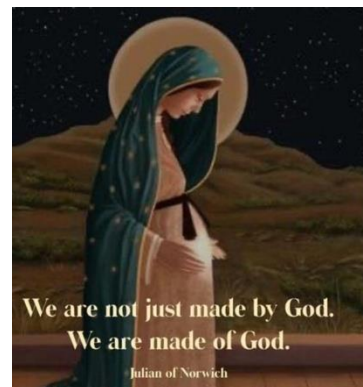
women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be^[e] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Mary’s Song of Praise: ⁴⁶ And Mary^[a] said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, ⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; ⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”



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Witness (Revd Dr Tony Floyd): “Something to sing about?” (Luke 1.46-55)

1st note: Elizabeth’s response to what her unborn baby does – the activity of the Holy Spirit in her body is how Elizabeth names this. “**You are the most blessed of all women ...**” (1.41b)

2nd note: “... and how happy you are to believe that the Lord’s message to you will come true!” (1.45)

These two affirmations go together – blessed because you believe!

3rd note: Mary sings again an ancient song of praise! That song includes this affirmation of Elizabeth’s insights: “God has kept the promise made to our ancestors and has come to the help of God’s servant Israel. God has remembered to show mercy to Abraham (and to Sarah) and to all (God’s) descendants forever”. (1.54-55)

This song is no “Oh happy day!” It is not another version of “In the sweet by and by”, nor is it a gentle “lullaby” that Mary sings.

This is a war song, a battle cry based on other similar war songs sung in Israel’s past by other women, not by warriors. Women of deep faith and profound insight. This song is all active, in the present, happening now; it is not ‘off there’ in some other place or spiritual world. God has

- brought down the powerful lifted up the lowly
- filled the hungry with good things sent the rich away empty.

The **poet** Mary Coleridge wrote:

*I saw a stable, low, and very bare,
a little child in a manger.
The oxen knew him, had Him in their care,
to [humans] He was a stranger.
The safety of the world was lying there,
and the world’s danger ...*

“God has kept the promise made to our ancestors and has come to the help of God’s servant Israel. God has remembered to show mercy to Abraham (and to Sarah) and to all his descendants forever”. (1.54-55)

TIME FOR RESPONDING

Song: TiS 473 Community of Christ

Some of the concerns we bring to God in our response –

Prayers of the People (Prepared by David Northwood)

The ministry of the whole church, the concerns of others, and the world – especially the lands and peoples of The People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Macau ...

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community but who are not at worship with us today."

Light the candle

Lord we pray
Hear our prayer today
As we pray for others
And for ourselves

During this advent period we reflect as
the angel Gabriel from heaven came
his wings as drifted snow his eyes as flame
All hail said he to meek and lowly Mary
most highly favoured lady
Gloria

O come O come Emmanuel
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the son of God appears
rejoice rejoice
Immanuel shall come to thee oh Israel

Heavenly Father, help us to hear your voice.
Touch us once again and give us the courage to be your beloved
and give us the courage to choose joy

Father just as you send John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, clear the path in our hearts too
Awaken us that we may be ready when the Christ comes and that we may receive him with joy.

Lord incline your merciful ears to our prayers and enlighten the darkness of our hearts with your light.

May our year be filled with peace, prosperity and love. May God's blessings shower upon us and bestow upon each of us a bright, healthy and peaceful new year.

And in this year open our eyes to the beauty and mystery of the world around us.

For if our imagination were not so weak, so easily tired, if our capacity for wonder were not so limited, we would abandon forever such fantasies of the supernal.

We would learn to perceive in water, leaves and silence, more than sufficient of the absolute and marvellous, more than enough console us for the loss of the ancient dreams.

Amen

Lord's Prayer. (Please feel free to pray that version you are most familiar with)

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.
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.

THE SCATTERING TIME

Song (TiS) 161 *Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord*

Blessing and sending out: ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4.2-7)

Go in peace ... **to love and serve the Lord**

Revd Dr Tony Floyd – Advent 3 - 2023

Postlude

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

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