

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



24 DECEMBER 2023

ADVENT 4



Love

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.

GREETING: Lisa Saffin

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY: Lisa Saffin

In the Dreaming, the Spirit of God brought forth the blessing of Ancient Life through Mother Earth.

Ground Beings were given breath and rhythm: the offspring of the heart of God!

This place was tended by the First Peoples of this Ground and this Land's rhythms. We give thanks for their custodianship and honour their Elders – past, present and future.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

"I am the Lord's servant. May it be as You have said."

A young woman named Mary opened her heart to your song. She heard the promise that she would give birth to a son who would break the bonds of oppression and transform the world,

And she believed.

You are a God who acts to save,

You are a God who does marvellous things!

You strengthen the weak.

You hear the prayers of the forgotten.

Come, let us give thanks to God!

Let's sing of God's love forever!

HYMN TiS 303: Hark the Herald Angels sing

LIGHTING OF THE 4TH ADVENT CANDLE:

LOVE: David, Heather and Sarah Baxter

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 fourth Sunday of Advent – the Candle of LOVE.

Voice 1: The prophets call, and the psalmists sing to announce that God is love.

Voice 2: "For the mountain may depart and the hills may be moved, but my steadfast love shall never depart from you... and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you." (Isaiah 54)

“Give thanks to the LORD, who is good... give thanks to the Lord of lords, whose steadfast love endures forever.” (Ps 136)

Voice 1: From the mystery of God’s love came our creation and we are nurtured daily by it. The power of God’s love is transformative; because we have received God’s love, we cannot remain the same. Love means seeking the best for others. Love is compassion for all creation. Love speaks the truth with kindness. Love is the way of seeing others as God sees them.

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

Jesus Christ is the love of God come into the world.

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

We light this candle to burn for love. (*Light the CANDLES of HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE*)

Sing verse 1, 2, 3 & 4 of CANDLE OF HOPE

PRAYERS OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS:

Dear God,
How majestic you are in all of Creation.
How majestic in love beyond imagining.
How majestic in sacrificing your own heart and soul in love outpoured.
How majestic in gifting us your Son: a babe, a man, a faithful one and a lover to the end.
How majestic in amazing grace
Majestic One we praise you forever
YET....
(*pause*)

Most High God,
**our plans are not yours,
our ways are not yours.
Yet you would still choose to use us
and we would take your choice as our license
and choose to use you.
You reveal your glory,
and we hide it away.
You plant your word within us,
we pick and choose our words,
building our fiefdom
instead of proclaiming your Gospel.
Forgive us Lord the sins we name,
Save us Lord from the sins we evade.**

In true repentance, we turn to you and ask that you use us to make known your love

We pray in the name of Immanuel

Amen

Bill Wesner- prayer of confession

READING ONE: Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 Robyn Mulder

¹I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

²**I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.**

³You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:

⁴**I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations."**

Selah

¹⁹Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: "I have set the crown on one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people.

²⁰**I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him;**

²¹my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.

²²**The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him.**

²³I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

²⁴**My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted.**

²⁵I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

²⁶**He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'**

HYMN TIS 304: O Come All Ye Faithful (verses 1, 2, and 5)

READING TWO: 2 Samuel 7:1-16 Lisa Saffin

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus, says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

HYMN TiS 318: Away in a Manger

READING THREE: John 1:1-14 Brenda Grootendorst

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

HYMN TIS 293: Unto us a Boy Is Born (v 1, 2, 4 & 5)

READING FOUR: Luke 1:26-38 Karen Roberts

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He 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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The 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. ³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then 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.

REFLECTION:

A Place to call home.

When we were going through Covid one of the highlights (among all the low lights!) was how we dealt with homeless people in Melbourne. As I recall the homeless were all housed in some form of accommodation – units/hotel rooms/motel rooms etc. Supposedly, there was not a single homeless person who was literally left out in the cold. Then when we got back to 'normal' they all got turfed out – left to fend for themselves again.

A place to call home?

Despite the horrific attack by Hamas on innocent Israelis, a genocide continues in Israel – the needless killing of 1000 upon 1000 of innocent (non Hamas Palestinian) men women and particularly horrifically, the killing of 1000 upon 1000 of innocent and vulnerable children – yet something else terrible is happening. The places Palestinians in Gaza call home have been destroyed on a mindboggling level. Thousands upon thousands, of homes have been razed to the ground. Many in Gaza now have no place to call home. Amazingly, quite a number of Palestinians are returning to their homes or what remains of them, determined to rebuild – even as the war continues to rage around them.

A place to call home

I cannot pretend to say other than I was devastated when I eventually found out, as we travelled overseas, about the result of the referendum to give our Indigenous Australians

a Voice to parliament. It seemed then, and still does, so pointless to deny our ancient ancestors a voice. Do Indigenous people call Australia 'a place to call home' – their home arguably. No! They are denied voice and home.

A place to call home?

On the Wednesday before last a car very full of goods, donated by you, were given to the Bridgadin Sisters for Refugees and Asylum seekers. Fantastic! In the place we all call home – planet earth, there are presently 100s of millions of refugees and asylum seekers who have been forced to flee their homes leaving everything other than the things they can carry. They have faced horrific dangers and adversity in fleeing terrible situations and look for a new place to call home.

A place to call home!?.

The OT reading this morning from 2 Samuel is about homes: A Home for King David and a Home for Yahweh - God! God promises a home and a homeland for king and country.

A place to call home.

Then in the gospel reading, when Mary accepts the task of birthing Jesus, the concept of home is surprisingly, extravagantly, amplified. The angel Gabriel relates to Mary that she will become pregnant through the Holy Spirit and bear a son and he will be called Jesus. Mary describes her unborn son, Jesus in the following way ⁴²*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.* ³³*He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*”

Later, inspired and uplifted by her God, the one God, the God who is pure love, she sings with joy about the new home, the new homeland her Son will create in and through himself.

READING FIVE: Luke 1:46-55 Lisa Saffin

⁴⁶And 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 forever.’

REFLECTION (concluded):

A place to call home – BUT, oh my, what a home!
Do you believe it? Mary did! Praise her holy name.

HYMN TiS 317: Love Came Down at Christmas (Tune: GARTAN AHB 243(i))

1. Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
star and angel gave the sign
2. Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus:
but wherewith for sacred sign
3. Love shall be our token,
love be yours and love be mine,
love to God and neighbour,
love for plea and gift and sign.

Christina Georgina Rosetti

NOTICES:

Please read the attached notices. Also, we would encourage you to donate to the Christmas Bowl. There are Christmas Bowl Donation envelopes available out front. Just Ask. If none are available simply put your donation in a plain envelope and mark it for the Christmas Bowl and put it in the offering plate. Make it clear that your donation was from OUC. Also, all the offerings from the Christmas Day service tomorrow, will be for the Christmas Bowl

HYMN TiS 311: Silent Night

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS: Jan Davenport

"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

Let us pray

We praise you O God, because you have freely given your gifts of hope, peace, joy and love; wrapping them in human form, so that we might know you. As we have celebrated Advent, we thank you that we have been able to experience anew the wonder of your word made flesh, in all our experiences of hope, peace, joy and love in the world.

Lord, as our tables groan with the weight of Christmas fare, shop windows bulge with luxuries, and spending becomes frantic, we remember far too many children with starved and swollen bellies. We remember the empty-handed refugee who owns nothing. We remember those whose poverty and brokenness indicate terrible exploitation. We also remember the Christmas Bowl, and the giving in love it offers to that world of child poverty, refugees and exploitation of the weak and vulnerable, and we give thanks.

We are grateful for your Church, as it worships you, against the background of a busy world at Christmas. A world preoccupied with the loud and brash and oblivious to a primitive stable, an unmarried mother, a poor family, a humble birth. May we in the Christian community focus on your gift of love to all people through the Christ child. Challenge us Lord, to extend that focus and thankfulness to all who are poor, broken, vulnerable and oppressed. In so doing may we drink into our souls once more, the mystery of your love made flesh.

Lord, like Mary, may we too, cry out with joy. 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word,' as WE share your word and love with others:

- with the sick,
- with the suffering,
- with the tired,
- with the sad,
- with the lonely.

And now in silence we pray for any we know of who are in need... ..(*allow a brief time of silence*)

Lord, as we draw to the conclusion of this season of Advent, and await with awe the birth of your Son:

- we will rejoice in and spread abroad your love.
- we will know the filling to overflowing of our souls with wonder and joy.
- we will live in peace with you and our neighbour.
- and we will find true fulfillment in your hope.

Come, Lord Jesus, Come!

AMEN.

Let us pray together the LORD'S 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.

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 299: While Shepherds Watched

DISMISSAL:

Loving God, our hearts echo the ancient cry:

Come, O come Emmanuel!

Go with God's love shining in your hearts.

Look with eyes of compassion,

be alert to the promptings of God's Spirit.

Be ready to share God's love with all whom you meet,

Be alert to the unfolding purposes of

God in your life and the lives of those around you. Amen.

Come, O come Emmanuel!

BENEDICTION:

'Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever!

Amen.' *Romans 16:25-27*

WORD OF MISSION: Lisa Saffin

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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Presider: Rev Ron Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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NEWS & NOTICES