

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



25 DECEMBER 2023

XMAS DAY



BE A RISK-TAKER FOR LOVE!

(like Jesus!)

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: 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 COUNTRY:

As we look upon the hills and valleys, we see the love poured out upon this Land by those who have cared for this Land since time beyond measure.

We honour those who have gone before and those who are yet to come.

May we be mindful of the calling God places on humanity to care for Creation.

May we take the lead from the First People, whose stories are entwined with the stewarding of this place. May we learn from them and walk with them

CALL TO WORSHIP:

We sing like we've never sung before, LORD;
singing to you with all the earth.

Every mention of your name sets us singing your praises.

We never tire of telling the story of how you bailed us out;
all over the world, we speak of your incredible accomplishments;

everyone we meet hears us giving the credit to you.

You are the greatest, LORD; we can't praise you enough!

When it comes to gods, you are in a league of your own;

all other objects of devotion are powerless.

We offer ourselves to you, LORD;

we fall to our knees in this beautiful place of worship;

with all the earth, we celebrate you alone.

You are our king, LORD; we'll tell everyone everywhere!

You have set the world on firm foundations,

and with you in charge, everyone will get a fair go.

Let the heavens and the earth celebrate;

let the roar of the sea join in;

let everything that walks, flies or swims join the party!

You are on your way, LORD,

Let us worship the Christ-Child who has arrived!

Hallelujah!

Selected verses of Psalm 96 paraphrased©2001 Nathan Nettleton LaughingBird.net

HYMN TIS 268: Joy to the world

CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY: THE LIGHT OF THE

WORLD: CHRISTMAS DAY YR B – 25th Dec: *Helen McPherson and Mardie Townsend*

Helen: During Advent we have progressively lit four Advent candles over the four Sundays of the season, leading up to the lighting of the Christ Candle on Christmas Day.

Mardie: Let's light the candle for CHRISTMAS DAY – the central Candle: CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Helen: The angels sing the glory of God in the highest heavens.

Mardie: “Be not afraid, for I bring you good news of great joy for all people. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord... you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!” (Luke 2)

Helen: At Christmas, God speaks in signs. The baby in the manger is a sign of a new life and new governance shining in the world. Christ is born and the world is filled with the promise of hope, signs of peace, the wonder of joy and the incarnation of God’s love; the one who sheds his Light into all our darkness.

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

ALL: **Jesus Christ is the light of the world.**

Mardie: We join with all creation in joyful praise.

ALL: **We light this candle because God has been made flesh and dwells among us.** (The CANDLES of HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE and the CHRIST CANDLE are lit)

The Candle Lighting Liturgy was adapted from Presbyterian World Service and Development CANADA: The Development and Relief Agency of the Presbyterian Church of CANADA

Sing verse 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 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.
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.

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PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS:

Let us pray.

So, Lord God, you have come to us.

You didn't wait for us to become good.

You didn't stay away until we searched for you.

You took the initiative.

You entered the world you made, as a creature,
so that you could enter the world of our experience
and meet us where we are, as we are.

And so, we know that as we pray,
you hear and you understand, and you answer.

Come into our world again.
Bring your peace and love and trust
into a world of war and hatred and suspicion.

Come into this land again.
Bring your healing into a country ravaged
by broken communities, broken relationships,
and bodies broken by addiction, cancer, hatred, greed
and all kinds of diseases.

Come into your church again.
Bring faith and inspiration
into the community that you call to be your loving servant to the world.

And come into our lives, and those of our loved ones again.
May we know in the depth of our souls, today and every day, that God is truly with us, no
matter what life brings.

We welcome you and your healing love into our world.
Amen.

FORGIVENESS

God who comes to us,
let us know your awesome LOVE rising within us and among us to create the world of
your dreams.
Amen.

In the name of the Christ Child, I declare every blot is wiped away and we are made whole
in him!

Thanks be to God

READINGS:

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

ISAIAH 9:2-7

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. ³You 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. ⁴For 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. ⁵For all the boots of the
tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the
fire. ⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his
shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince
of Peace. ⁷His 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 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. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of
Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph 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. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to

whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And 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.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” ¹⁵When 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.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The 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**

HYMN TIS 292: Infant holy

SERMON: Risk Taking.

What do you think the key to Christmas is?

How about risk-taking!? Can I suggest risk-taking is right up there!

Let me explain by starting with a story about some pretty extraordinary risk-taking. A true story from the US.

‘A homeless man in Colorado used what little he had to *give a selfless gift* during a toy drive (ie, a charity drive by a department store which asks you to buy a toy which the store then gives to those kids and families in need). The store he visited was a local Walmart (like K-mart). Glen McCarthy walked to Walmart to get a cup of coffee, and was instantly touched by the toy drive that was going on. He ended up buying a Barbie and a Hot Wheels set, but he couldn’t stop thinking about a shiny new kid’s bike he saw.

“And I looked at that bike, and the bike was marked \$59, but the tag underneath it said \$44,” he said.

It’s not a lot of money for some, but for Glen, it was nearly everything. Later that night, he still couldn’t stop thinking about the bike and how happy it would make a kid who had nothing. Come Christmas morning, he walked back to Walmart and asked about the bike. Once the shop assistant realized what he was doing, she told him that he could have the bike for the lower marked price of \$44.

He said, ‘I got to thinking, this is probably going to be my last Christmas. I’m no one, so might as well make some little kid happy. It took my losing everything to realize that I’m happier now in my life than when I had big money,’

I was really struck by that last line of his story – it spoke powerfully to me of the Christmas God. *‘It took my losing everything to realize that I’m happier now in my life than when I had big money,’*

The RISK TAKER! The God who, gives away everything that matters.

Think about it for a moment: Christmas defines some pretty remarkable risk-taking!

1. God the infinite becomes finite.
2. God the Creator of all becomes the creature.
3. God who made everything risks all!
4. God who is eternal, becomes self-limited to a particular time, space and life.
5. God becomes a vulnerable helpless child.
6. God who gives life, and is eternal life, opens God's self to dying – to losing life.

In terms of the way we humans weigh things up, guess what!? God is an absolute loser, a total idiot. Why would the all-powerful God, who created the whole universe, who is eternal, why enter the world as a vulnerable, at-threat child, who will die? Preposterous!

That can't be true. Surely that is sheer madness!

So, Why!?! Why engage in such apparent madness!

Let me extend this ridiculous proposition a little more.

Why, following his birth in Bethlehem, would he then go on to live a real human life of vulnerability and service?

Why?

Also, why would the all-powerful chose to live a life which challenges the powers that be, both political and religious, knowing full well their 'god' is one of power, control, self-interest: looking after NUMBER ONE!

Why?

Is it any wonder we humans killed him, this ridiculous risk-taker!!! This vulnerable weak useless 'god!'

So, WHY come to the earthly realm, in this way!?!??

I guess you know the ANSWER!

Nevertheless, the answer is as counterculture as it is profound.

Why? Why: Emmanuel: God with us: why?

Very simple, really.

Pure Love which risks all for the sake of the other! The Creator loves her creatures so much, she will become one of them and even die for them. That's why!

Love which knows no limit.

The God of love is willing to risk all, so that others can live and flourish and love.

The hymn writer Luke Connaughton describes our risk-taking God as follows.

'Love, only love, is his way, Love, only love, is his name, Love, only love, is his word.'

And Brian Wren describes our risk-taking God in his Christmas Carol: 'O how joyfully,' in the following way:

Loves comes healing, God revealing. Friends be joyful and believe. Sins are covered,
grace discovered. In our darkness shines the light. God has spoken, death is broken.
Alleluia, Christ is born. from B Wren's hymn 330

We know his way – we know God's way: so, let's celebrate joyful, abundant, flourishing love-full life, in and through this babe, and the love he brings. He risked his all in loving his heavenly Father and all of us, eventually surrendering his life out of love for God and all of us.

The message for us to take into our Christmas days and into our lives:

Be risk takers for and in love, be risk takers for and in love, just like Glen McCarthy. And paradoxically, like him discover deep abiding joy – happiness is too weak a word here – deep abiding joy in Christ! No risk at all, really, when this vulnerable Christ-child became the Saviour of us all.

Such is love.

Amen

HYMN TIS 307: The Virgin Mary

OFFERING FOR CHRISTMAS BOWL – please give to the Christmas Bowl (see Notices)

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

"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

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise that at your coming the angels sing a message of peace and good will.

We pray for all our brothers and sisters who long still to hear your message today; those whose lives are shattered by war; for victims of hatred and persecution.

By your light dispel the darkness of our aggression and intolerance.

Jesus, hope of all the world, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise for your coming among us, for we have found favour with you, and you delight to dwell with us.

We pray for our sisters and brothers in Christ as together we celebrate your birth; for all who spread your good news and all who have never heard your name.

By your light dispel the darkness of our faithlessness and disobedience.

Jesus, hope of all the world, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise that at your coming you are born into a family, sharing our human joys and sorrows.

We pray for our families and friends and all with whom our lives are bound; for those separated from loved ones; those who will spend Christmas alone.

By your light dispel the darkness of our loneliness and selfishness.

Jesus, hope of all the world, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise that at your coming you make your place with the unwanted and poor.

We pray for all for whom society finds no room; for the homeless, the outcast, the friendless and the unloved;

for the sick and the dying and for all who minister to them.

By your light dispel the darkness of our terror and pain.

Jesus, hope of all the world, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise that throughout the ages people have rejoiced at your coming.

We give you thanks for all who have recognised you and pointed others to you; for the virgin Mary, for Joseph, for the shepherds and sages; for all who have searched for you and come to worship you.

By your light dispel the darkness of death, so that we, with all your saints, may come at last to the radiance of your presence.

Jesus, hope of all the world, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Loving God, open our eyes to see the signs of your coming, open our ears to hear the angel voices, open our hearts to make a place for you; let us recognise you in our midst, for we too would worship you.

Jesus, hope of all the world, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

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 309: Angels from the realms of glory (v1, 2 & 4)

DISMISSAL:

We have heard the story as it begins.

It is yet to end.

It continues to be re-born in us,
the spark of the divine in us
as we play our part in God's mission
in the world.

We leave from here, to live that story,
to tell the story again

of love born at Christmas

and to be bearers of hope, peace, joy, love and the light of the world.

BENEDICTION:

May the mystery of God enfold us.

May the wisdom of God uphold us.

May the fragrance of God be around us.

May the brightness of God surround us.

May the wonder of God renew us.

May the loving of God flow through us.

May the peace of God deeply move us.

May the moving of God bring us peace.

WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace and love to serve the Lord / **In the name of the Christ Child. Amen**

Prayers for others: Janet Nelson, 'Let us Pray'

Prayers of adoration, confession and forgiveness: adapted from 'Sacredise.'

Postlude

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

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Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES