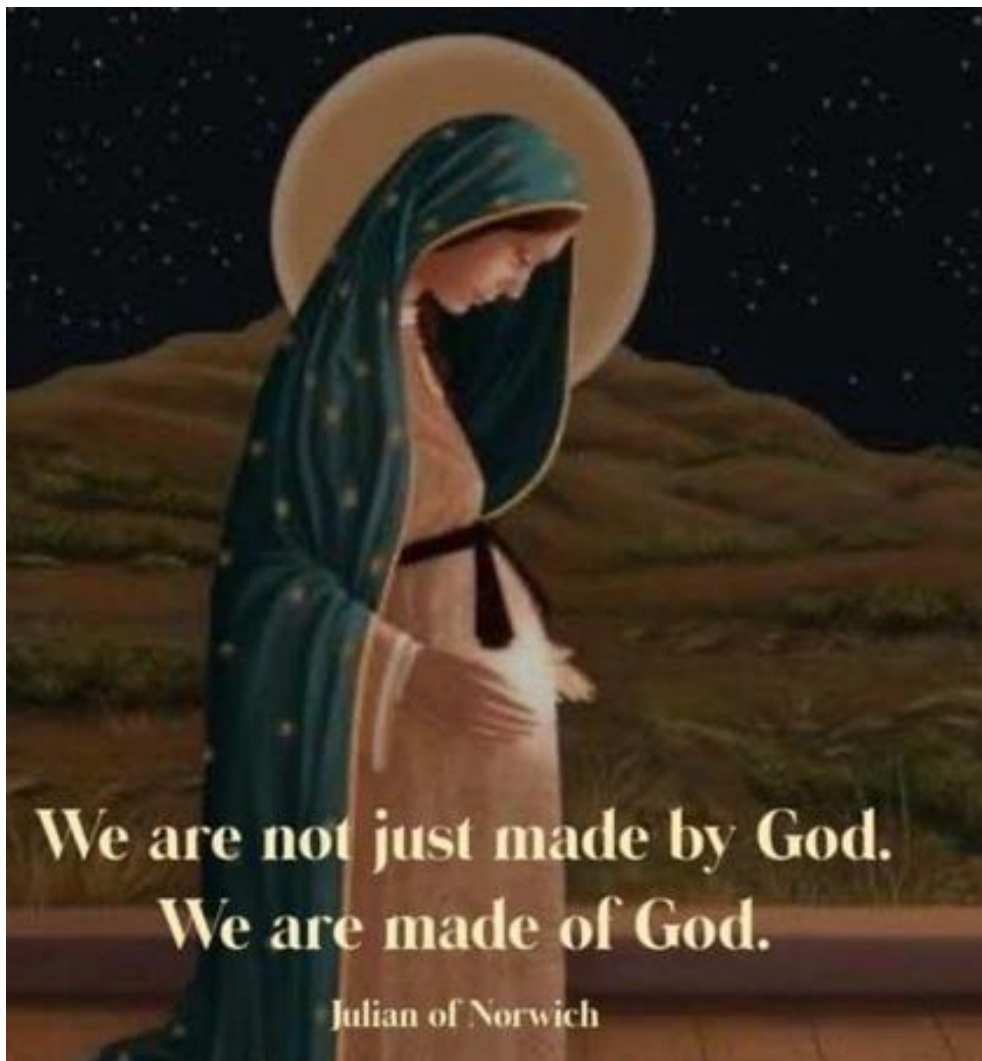


# ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



15 DECEMBER 2024

ADVENT 3



Waiting

# WORSHIP FOR THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY – 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.*

*Go to your prepared place OR prepare a space in the house; a comfortable chair, a lit 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. **You may have a small collection of candles to light, one by one, these Sundays leading up to Christmas. Today we light 2 candles – Hope and Peace***

***JOY:** Lord, oil the hinges of our hearts doors that they may swing gently and easily that we may welcome your coming with joy!*

**Focusing ...** *As we pause to contemplate this ongoing season after Pentecost we hear of and are invited to name our own experiences of the generous grace and mercy given for the whole creation, the richness of life unearned and undeserved. In the quietness and stillness of this time, be grateful to the loving creator/parent, who faithfully travels with us through the storms of our lives, especially when we feel alone, confused and despair.*

**Acknowledgement of Country:** We come to meet today 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.

**Advent Gathering** - We follow the ancient tradition of lighting of candles through the season of Advent – Preparation/Waiting. Here we light them in the middle of the Australian summer, as signs of hope, still reminding us of that 'other' darkness – broken lives, lost hope, longing for justice and peace where there is none. Today we light the third of this season's Advent candles.- the candle of Joy!

**Reader One:** No matter what troubles overwhelm us today, Isaiah reminds us that in all of our preparation and passionate pursuit of God's coming kin-dom, we must not forget that God's salvation has come and is coming. "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). With joy you will remember that God's salvation is already present among us.

**Congregation:** **Faced with the troubles and the suffering of the world, we choose to live in joyful presence to God and one another. We will not turn away from the pain and the hurt in our world, and we will not stop rejoicing in God, whose salvation fills us to overflowing that God's love might flow through us and flood our troubled world with hope, peace, and joy.**

**Reader Two:** We light this candle of joy as a sign of our commitment to be present to ourselves, our friends, our families, and our neighbours that in sharing our vulnerable lives we might share in the glorious joy of God's salvation together.

*Light the third (pink/rose) candle of the Advent wreath.*

**SING v1, 2 and 3 of Candle of Hope (Tune TiS 470)**

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.

## Prayers of praise and thanksgiving followed by our confession

“Open our eyes” an Advent prayer #1 (Cloth for the Cradle p 35)

Open our eyes, Lord, especially if they are half-shut because we are tired of looking, or half-open because we fear to see too much or bleared with tears because yesterday and today and tomorrow are filled with the same pain, or contracted, because we only look at what we want to see.

Open our eyes – Lord to gently scan the life we lead, the home we have, the world we inhabit, and so to find, among the gremlins and the greyness, signs of hope we can fasten on to and encourage.

Open our eyes, in yearning, for Jesus ... on the mountains, in the cities, through the corridors of power, and streets of despair, to help, to heal, to confront, to convert. O come; O come Emmanuel!

### Confession (Psalm 85.8-13)

- <sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O LORD,  
**like the watercourses in the Negeb.**  
<sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears  
**reap with shouts of joy.**  
<sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
**shall come home with shouts of joy,**  
**carrying their sheaves.**

“Hear the word of gracious forgiveness and promise, in Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven! **Amen! Thanks be to God!**”

## Listening time

### Readings from the Bible (Intro – Tony F)

Last week I reminded us that one Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, says that Scripture “*funds the imagination.*” Advent is a wonderful time to “fund the imagination” from Bible stories. So listen with your minds and imaginations as the stories for today are read to us – listen for in this you might hear the Word of God!

Lord, your word is a light for our feet, **a lamp for our path**

#### Isaiah chapter 12 and verses 2-6

- <sup>2</sup> Surely God is my salvation;  
I will trust and will not be afraid,  
for the Lord is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.”

<sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. <sup>4</sup> And you will say on that day:

“Give thanks to the Lord;  
call on his name;  
make known his deeds among the nations;  
proclaim that his name is exalted.  
<sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be known in all the earth.  
<sup>6</sup> Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

### Second reading from the Bible – the Gospel (Good News) of Luke 3:7-18

<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, “What, then, should we do?” <sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup> He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people.

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In these scriptures my we hear the Word of God – **thanks be to God**

## Hymn/Song (TiS) 279 The king of glory comes

### Prayer

### Reflection on the Word – Revd Dr. Tony Floyd

In the biblical stories, God’s salvation - saving acts, are about a change in the order of society, in the way things are and seem meant to be. This activity is cause for JOY!

This God wants everyone for Godself; but all as God's image, God’s people, and God’s free children.

But there is a ‘rub’ in all this biblical stuff! In God’s society the hungry will be fed - spiritually **and** physically. In God’s society the lowly will be lifted up, given full humanity, no longer seen as diminished people somehow to be pitied or taught to improve their own lot, or forced only onto their own resources. **These are the deeds of God's mercy and come to pass through those who know their need of such mercy.** The alarming element for the free economist – spiritual or material – is that the user does not have to “pay”.

On the other side, those in control, whose power and might controls the destiny of the many, they will be disempowered; where it matters most - their ability to determine the humanity of others will be taken away.

In Luke - this is an image of God's SALVATION: what John the Baptist announces in today's story from Luke.

Jesus himself picks it up. First in his sermon at Nazareth, and in other places in his preaching, where he preaches on Isaiah 61. Listen:

**"Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you that mourn, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be filled" (Luke 6:21-22).**

Luke clearly intends that we **should** understand Jesus to be talking about **real** poor and **real** rich **NOT** simply those who are **spiritually** poor (whatever that may mean).

SALVATION in Luke's gospel is NEVER concerned with only one part of a human being, for instance a soul or spirit.

**Salvation is wholeness for the total human person** and includes healing, forgiveness, inner liberation, as well as a transforming attitude to our resources. For the ten lepers, all are healed on their illness, but only ONE (a SAMARITAN) is made whole.

**Salvation is concerned with the structures of oppression**, demonic and otherwise. People are liberated from deep forces that oppress them from within through healing, exorcism, and the overturning of societal barriers that exclude some and maintain privilege for others.

In Mary's song (the Magnificat) of Luke 1, this is a vision of upheaval and of final peace for all people.

In the Lord's prayer, there is an expectation of fulfillment HERE – "...on earth as in heaven!"

In Luke's two books - gospel and Acts - **salvation is for all** in that it reaches to all nations and peoples. This is explicit in the stories Luke uses about Jesus' love for outcasts, foreigners, refugees, the underprivileged, women, children, the undeserving and rogues of his time and place. Everyone is taken seriously as people - NOT simply as SOCIAL CLASSES OR ANONYMOUS GROUPS.

As a man goes after a lost sheep, a woman after a lost coin and they rejoice with great JOY at finding them; so too, God's joy is to find those who are lost. Jesus appeals to a different way of doing theology - **a theology of love and relationships, of joy at the 'finding' and delight at the 'return'.**

This is clearly seen in the story of Zachaeus. Jesus reaches out to this *little man* and the change is expressed in a transformed attitude to the poor. Zachaeus himself becomes 'good news' for the poor; good news towards those he had wronged. This is enough for Jesus to proclaim that salvation has come to his house.

**Salvation here means offering a relationship within which change can take place**, whatever that might mean in each particular case.

And in Luke's own day, **the church is the community of salvation** carrying within itself the challenge and the agenda of both the Nazareth sermon and of the overture to this Gospel.

This challenge and agenda are **lived out** as a true people of God despised by the righteous, but called to be light for the nations, to be good news of universal salvation for all people, to offer an alternative model of personal and community life. And not only that, but an alternative way of speaking of those hurtful and even demonic things that characterise our world and its news services e.g. Palestine/Israel --- **Arabs/Jews**.

Our call is to follow the way of co-operating in the work of God by sharing in bringing about what John calls people to - to turn around and enter God's salvation. This is something that Mary recognised, and which caused her to burst out in her great outburst song of joy. The earth and all its peoples are God's, now **and** in the yet to be seen future.

To be one of the 'saved of God' is to live with a deep awareness that all of our lives are under the scrutiny of God who is coming to reorder life, justice and peace - **and** THAT is cause for joy.

To be one of the 'saved of God' is to be invited to get our lives in tune with this rule of God, and that is something to sing about. That is cause for joy!

Our challenge is to join in or not.

## A TIME FOR RESPONDING

### Hymn/song (Together In Song - TIS) 414 There's a spirit in the air

There's a spirit in the air, telling Christians everywhere:

'Praise the love that Christ revealed, living, working in our world.'

May the Spirit fill our praise, guide our thoughts and change our ways:  
God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today.

There's a Spirit in the air, calling people everywhere:

'Praise the love that Christ revealed, living, working in our world.'

**Announcements** about programs and activities.

### Prayers of the people – Prepared by Marg Davis

"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.*

On this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent we join together to rejoice as we await the celebration of Christ's birth.

#### **Let us pray**

Dear Lord, in this world that you love so much we give thanks for all our blessings.

As in the time of Isaiah, countries are still at war and in turmoil and we pray for all involved- especially for the innocent citizens and children, who have and are suffering the consequences.

We think of our Jewish neighbours, who are mourning the fire bombing of their place of worship. Once again it is innocent people being made to suffer for the actions of others in lands far away.

Lord help us to care for each other with respect and kindness.

We pray for your church around the world and in Australia – in all its forms- and we hope that the message of love and peace remains at the centre of religion.

We pray for all church, and political leaders, and ask you to help them to listen with open ears, not to just what they want to hear, so they can make informed and inclusive decisions for the majority, not only the ones with the loudest voices.

In our prayers we remember our indigenous sisters and brothers and we acknowledge that we have much to learn from them. Help us all to be more tolerant and to live together in harmony.

We pray for all that are suffering including: the sick, the grieving, those who are sad, the lonely, the misunderstood, the outcasts of society and those who are anxious having just received their VCE results. We also pray for carers, volunteers and the many who dedicate their lives to helping others.

At this time we also pray for our family and friends and those known to us and we pause for personal prayer.....

Thank-you Dear Lord for hearing our prayers today and we join together and say the prayer that you taught us.

### **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 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/Song (Together in Song – TIS) 152 Joyful, joyful**

Joyful, joyful, we adore you, God of glory, God of love;  
hearts unfold like flowers before you opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the dark of doubt away;  
giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

**(IF YOU ARE ABLE, PLEASE REMAIN STANDING FOR THE BLESSING)**

**Word of Mission:** As the people and events crowd in during these waiting days, may the Holy child of God, help you to be on the look-out for his coming. May the Holy Spirit of God open your eyes to see him in the guise of friend and stranger. Whatever the path, wherever the place, however the child comes to us, may there be recognition, and joyous welcoming.

**Blessing:** And the blessing of God almighty, Creator, Spirit and loving Christ, be with and keep you all, this day and always.

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

***You are warmly invited to stay after the worship service to share in morning***

## **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 Dr Tony Floyd  
Music: Peter Hurley

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## **NEWS & NOTICES**