

THE OLIVE BRANCH

Advent & Christmas 2019 Brunswick Uniting Church Congregation

This special edition of the Olive Branch focuses solely on our journey through Advent and Christmas offering links to prayers, sermons, audio recordings and Chris Magee's pageant photo collection.

Our thanks to Amelia Ware whose vision offered us the Advent Tree which grew week by week to become our Christmas Tree bearing the gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

> Advent Litany

We focussed on the lectionary readings from Isaiah for Advent which gave shape to our Advent litany.

Advent 1, 1st December

The prophet Isaiah speaks

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more. Isaiah 2:4b

We light this first candle for hope.
God of all creation plant your seeds of hope
deep within our aching hearts.
In the dry barrenness of our times
water them well with your eternal love
that we may become beacons of hope
working together for the renewal of all creation.

Advent 2, 8th December

The prophet Isaiah speaks

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding. Isaiah 11:1-2a

We light this second candle for peace.
God of justice fill our hearts and minds
with your deep abiding peace.
Amidst the noisy clamour of injustice
remind us every day that you are faithful
and help us to walk with Jesus on the
green shaded path of peace and righteousness.



Advent 3, 15th December

The prophet Isaiah speaks

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing. Isaiah 35:1-2a

We light this third candle for joy.
God of joyful and glorious abundance
open our ears and eyes to delight and gladness.
Take the wilderness of ignorance and greed
that seeks to destroy all that is good and
help us to spread joy like carpets of crocus
as we work with you to transform the world.

Advent 4, 22nd December

The prophet Isaiah speaks

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.
Look, the young woman
is with child and shall bear a son,
and shall name him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

We light this fourth candle for love
Nurturing mothering God,
hold us tenderly in your loving embrace.
Our world, our home, this land is suffering
under the weight of our humanity
help us to bear fruits of love like you do,
with all that we have and all that we are.

> Preparing for Advent

The worship committee delights in the creative process that gives shape to the big liturgical festivals on our calendar. We read the lectionary. We reflect on what is happening in our congregation, the community and the world beyond our doors. We seek to provide a thread through the seasons as Advent leads into Christmas and Lent leads into Holy Week.

We also seek to provide a song and a visual focus, something that reminds us of the themes for the season. This year the Advent Tree provided the visual focus, see page 3. In the absence of a suitable published song we commissioned Shawn Whelan to write a song to be sung after the candles were lit. Thank you Shawn.

Come, we pray

*Come, we pray, O God be with us
Come Emmanuel
Come, we pray, O God be with us
Come Emmanuel
Come Emmanuel*

Advent 1:

When will we beat our swords to ploughshares?
Come Emmanuel
When will we walk your paths of justice?
Come Emmanuel

Advent 2:

When will we see the branch of Jesse?
Come Emmanuel
When will the nations seek your wisdom?
Come Emmanuel

Advent 3:

When will we strengthen weak and weary?
Come Emmanuel
When will we leave our fears behind us?
Come Emmanuel

Advent 4:

*Come, we pray, O God be with us
Come Emmanuel
Come, we pray, O God be with us
Come Emmanuel
Come Emmanuel*

We have seen the child among us
O Emmanuel
Christ declares God's reign here for us
O Emmanuel

*May we hear your voice within us
O Emmanuel
May we build your reign among us
O Emmanuel
O Emmanuel*



> Advent Tree

As mentioned on the front page our Advent Tree was the inspiration of and curated by Amelia Ware, liturgist, member of the worship committee and Elder. As part of the creative process the worship committee invited the Olive Pesto and Sunday Morning Program communities to collaborate with us on this grand scale creative project. We are so very grateful for the bountiful gifts offered - leaves from SMP, tendrils, flowers and fruit from members of the OP community. Thank you to everyone who contributed. The tree and everything that followed was a truly a gift for the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Each week the children gathered around the tree as families lit the candles whilst offering the Advent litany.



On **Advent 1** the tree trunk stood as a symbol of the gift of hope. Jessica and Anya Kavansakul lit the first candle.



On **Advent 2** the green of the gift of peace was added in cloths, crocheted tendrils and paper leaves. Dave Miller, Maxine, Clementine and Harriet Loynd lit the second candle for peace.



On **Advent 3** crocuses and other flowers blossomed on the tree offering us a glimpse of the gift of joy. Brad, Colleen, Sam and Hudson Coath lit the third candle for joy.



On **Advent 4** the tree bore an abundance of fruit reminding us of the gift of love. Leigh Johnson, Catherine, Greta and Rowan Drimmel lit the fourth candle for love.



> Advent Worship

1/12, [Advent 1-Hope](#), Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44 On this first Sunday in Advent Ian and Dave introduced the Advent Tree and candles with the children. They spoke of the experience of waiting and hoping, lighting a new candle each week. Ian reminded us that the candle 'wreath' was created from an old water tank by his brother and commented that this is very relevant to the reading from Isaiah where one kind of metal is turned into another - turning swords into ploughshares and showed us a pair of very old and heavy ploughshares. They spoke of the plough being used to plough the field to plant seeds and that we are planting the seeds of hope in Advent. The weapons of war become tools for planting and growing.



Ian introduced the season of Advent explaining that we will be hearing a series of readings from the prophet Isaiah and that it is from these readings that we get the image of the growth and the tree. The sermon '[Swords into ploughshares](#)' offered an invitation to reflect on the question *'When we look at the world around us how, where, what do we see of God's work?'* Ian introduced us to both Isaiah's vision of transforming peace and to 'Palas for Pistolas' the work of Mexican artist Pedro Reyes. He went on to speak about poetry and translation and in particular Hebrew poetry in which *'Hebrew poetry has two lines which state the same idea or image in different words'*, offering a list of examples from Isaiah's prophecy. Ian commented *'I think this is a good thing to notice to help us when we read the Bible. But it is more than that because it is designed to point us to the Word of God, to help us to see God's word. And for me it highlights the power of art, of creativity in general to transform the world.'* We moved then to the United Nations and Yemeni Yovetich's sculpture 'Let us beat swords into ploughshares'. Ian shared the story of this work and his concerns raised in relation to the heroic body engaged in the work of peace. Asking what does the body doing the work of peace look like for Christians he said *'... surely it is a crucified body, a wounded and yet living body'* and further listing many types of bodies *'... or any body that does not fit the idealised body image of our time which frankly is just about everybody'*. Returning to Palas por Pistolas he concluded *'All those guns ended up giving new life to the world, to that city. So is this what the word of God looks like? Where do you see that work being done? Where do you see God at work and can you hear the poetic, prophetic call to join in? Amen'*



8/12, [Advent 2-Peace](#), Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 3:1-12 Ian and Dave drew the children's attention to the new green on the tree. They spoke of the green shoot from the stump of Jesse and helped us to work out who Jesse and David are in the Bible, about David's family tree leading to Joseph, the father of Jesus. The children added leaves to the family Advent tree to remind us that we are all part of that tree as well.

In his sermon '[Growing a forest in the desert](#)' Ian introduced us to Tony Rinaudo, the forest maker, telling his story of reforestation in Niger. Ian noted that Isaiah shows us a similar stump in the family of Jesse. He explained that our four Advent prophecies come from the first 39 chapters of Isaiah which *'consists mainly of horrible harsh judgement'* and reminded us *'that there are actually only two sins in the Bible. Israel's kings are are guilty of both of them - injustice and idolatry.'* Ian noted that *'for Isaiah that corporate institutional judgement leads directly to the possibility of hope'*. He went onto speak the fires burning in eastern Australia right now and the conversations and commentary being shared in relation to them saying *'From a prophetic perspective, therefore, they are the self-inflicted result of our great injustices against indigenous Australians and the non-human world. The strong shall become like tinder and their work like a spark.'* Returning to Tony Rinaudo's story Ian said that change happened through a change of mindset - *'the question was not "what to do" but "what to stop doing"'*. Concluding he said that *'Isaiah calls for a change in mindset and behaviour to align with God's vision for creation, with God's way in the world ...'* He spoke of Mary's great song 'The Magnificat' which captures this vision of the world being turned upside down. And finally asked *'What change of mindset and behaviour is needed to nurture the natural growth of justice and peace and love? What change is needed for that growth? And how are we called to help it happen?'*



15/12, Advent 3-Joy, Isaiah 35:1-10; Matthew 11:2-11 Once again the children gathered with Ian and Dave around the Advent Tree. The SMP and Olive Pesto community provided flowers for the tree. After lighting the Advent candles they reflected on the qualities of joy. They spoke of the joy that we find in home and that our church can be a place of joy offering a sense of home.



Ian's sermon '[Home in joy](#)' offered opportunities for us to speak with our neighbours three times in response to a prompt. Ian began saying '*Friends there have been times in my life when my ankles have let me down.*' He shared two stories of being separated from his joy - with the first being when he was a full time dance student at the Australian Ballet School and suffered tendonitis. Ian offered this story to help us enter into the experience of Isaiah's first listeners in their time of separation from their joy, their home. We were invited to respond to the question '*Where is your home in joy? What brings you to the place you are most yourself, the place of joy?*'. Ian's second story related to his love of bushwalking and the separation from that joy due to planter fasciitis. He commented that in each case he '*returned to joy changed*'. We shared our responses to the questions '*What do you know of separation and return and of the scars – physical and psychic? What has kept you from joy? What has brought you back to joy?*' Speaking further about the exile for Isaiah's listeners Ian said '*the return is a journey of transformation through exile. In Christian terms it is the way of the Cross. For Christ and his followers joy comes through death and resurrection bearing scars.*' Once again commenting on Isaiah's prophecy Ian commented '*And so I hear Isaiah's prophetic words of healing hope applying not just to individuals but to society as a whole. The transforming power of God's love longs to bring us all to joy, no matter what suffering or disability we might know. ... We only find wholeness in God and we find God in loving community, loving communion with others.*' We were invited into conversation one more time responding to '*So what do you hear, what are you left with, what are you thinking about? What will you take away?*'. Ian concluded praying '*... Give us the grace of your Spirit that as Christ's followers may we lead the way on that desert highway, the road to joy. In his Holy Name we pray. Amen.*'



22/12, Advent 4-Love, Isaiah 7:10-16; Matthew 1:18-25 The four Advent candles were lit. Ian reminded us of the Tree's journey and that it bears the fruit of love. We acted out that love of God together in the baptism of Arvin, second son of Sahar & Alireza Talebi. See the next page.



With a few days till Christmas Ian asked '[What difference does Christmas make?](#)' He began by inviting us to separate out the different elements of '*the two very different Christmas stories in the Bible*'. And then offered us a summary of the version from the Gospel of Matthew that we had read earlier saying thank God for Luke. He then went on to highlight the one common plot point in Matthew and Luke - '*Mary is a pregnant virgin*'.

Ian explained that '*the virginity of Mary is theological, not gynaecological*' and further that '*Isaiah is not actually prophesying a miraculous birth, a virginal conception, he is prophesying the birth of Immanuel – God with us. And that is what makes all the difference at Christmas – God coming to be with us, not above or beyond us, not without us, not instead of us but God with us.*' Ian concluded '*God is a faithful source of hope even when our situation seems completely hopeless. Matthew and Luke both want us to remember this tradition as we read about Mary's pregnancy. They are saying 'Jesus comes into the world riding the same divine wave of hope for new life that carries him out of the tomb.'* Yes friends the virgin birth is a pre-echo of the resurrection. The two biggest stumbling blocks to faith for post enlightenment literalistic folk. But this changes everything. This is the difference that Christmas and Easter make. God is with us and not just any God but the One who brings light out of darkness, new life in infertile places, hope in the face of death, peace amidst divisions of humanity, joy to the broken earth and above all love, the love that takes hold of us when we least expect it like a child in a virgin's womb. This is the God who comes to be with us at Christmas to change everything. Amen



Advent Choir thank you - This service with it's theme shaped by the gift of love also gave us the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the musical gifts with which our congregation is so abundantly blessed. See the next page for links to the recordings. In this space - thank you to Elaine Potter for her generosity in leading and shaping the large group of singers, who could not always meet together, into the mass choir for this service and then again at the Pageant and finally with a small group for the late Christmas Eve service. So much to love. Thank you Elaine.



> Stories from Advent 4

Advent Choir 2019

Our Advent Choir offered two beautiful items during worship: 'Hope was born this Christmas' and 'Mary did you know?'. The choir was directed by Elaine Potter and accompanied by Leigh Johnston and Alistair Hunter.

You can also [view videos here](#), with thanks to Mal Rowe.



Baptism



As we remembered God's Christmas gift of love we celebrated the baptism of Arvin, second son of Sahar & Alireza Talebi. Presenting Arvin Amelia Ware shared that *Arvin was born one year ago the day before (21/12) and so this celebration is for his birthday and his new birth as a child of God. Ali & Sahar have no family in Australia. Their families have not met Arvin or his brother Artin. And so today we remember Arvin's grandparents and other family members in Iran as we commit to being his God family here, his family in Christ. Arvin is a clever boy. He listens to what people say and he understands them. He likes to be with his parents and he also likes playing with other children. He also enjoys music and he is sensitive. When his parents get said, he gets sad also. But mostly he is a very happy person.*

Preparing to bless the water and oil Ian commented that the water comes from the rain water tank and the oil from olives pressed from the trees growing around our church. This [recording of the baptism ceremony](#) sparkles with love and joy. You won't regret setting aside 15 minutes to listen, please note that the ceremony starts at the 6:38 mark.



Farewell

Later in the service we farewelled Daniel Broadstock. Daniel joined our congregation in 2014 and has served as an Elder and Secretary on Church Council and as a liturgist and musician. He has also been a member of the Discipleship & Education committee and the Mulling group. Daniel is moving to the UK to teach for at least 12 months.

Speaking briefly Daniel began by sharing that he had turned 30 this week and that on his first Sunday with us a couple called Klaus & Eva were being farewelled (2/2/14) for their return to Germany. He commented on the powerful love and care shown for those people which brought

him back again. He said *'That experience became my experience over the years. Goodness knows sometimes the great Christian church lets us down but this for me has been a good place, a sacred place. You've built me up, you've supported me in leadership. You've given me so much and I'm so grateful to you. I love this place dearly and I'll miss you a lot.'* He promised to send us some photos. We stood and blessed Daniel on his way singing 'For you deep stillness'.

Daniel concluded his time with us by offering the blessing for the service, having been the liturgist and then singing on Christmas Day.



> Blue Christmas



The season of Christmas began with Blue Christmas on **Sunday 15th December**. Our worship offered a meditation based on the traditional themes of Advent – God’s Christmas gifts to us of hope, peace, joy and love. It was shaped by the Advent litany, the Advent prophecies from Isaiah and the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke 2:1-14. You can [read the meditation here](#).

As we moved through the meditation those gathered were invited to write prayers for or names of people or situations that they held in their hearts. We placed the cards below the Advent tree, lighting tapers before gathering to celebrate Holy Communion.



> Christmas Celebrations



Olive Way Christmas Lunch

The annual Christmas lunch took on a new shape this year as we combined with the Brunswick Salvation Army. About 110 people booked in, but our booking system gave greater certainty with respect to catering, with around 120 attending altogether. Peter Murphy prepared a delicious lunch consisting of roast beef, ham and vegetables, efficiently organized and served by a team of 5. The Salvation Army brass band played before lunch with singers from BUC joining in to lead the carol singing. The SROC performance added a great sense of fun as always.



Many thanks to the organizing team: Peter Blair, Peter Murphy, Margaret Coombridge and the team from Salvos, as well as our regular volunteers, Helen Burnham, Bev, Hannah and Dom. Thanks also all to those from the church that turned up to help out on the day. We couldn't have done it without you!



Stewart Lodge Carols

On **Wednesday 18th December** the tradition of singing Christmas Carols with the residents of Stewart Lodge continued. We gathered at 6:30pm in the dining room because the temperature was far too high for our traditional outdoor arrangement. After a lovely time of chatting we sang carols from our little red carol book, as requested by the residents. The managers Stella and Vivian handed out the Christmas cards we had prepared after which we enjoyed supper together.



Thank you to the Olive Arts artists who provided the designs for the Christmas cards, to the group of people who wrote on the cards after worship on 8th December. Thank you to Kirsty Bennett for organizing the card writing session and a very big thank you to Jane Allardice who made many phone calls in an attempt to source appropriate gift cards. After further conversation and investigation we have now established a relationship with Savers.

The residents each received a \$30 gift card from Savers together a further discount voucher. Thank you to everybody who donated to support the purchase of the gift cards.



And finally thank you to Mal Rowe for this interesting commentary on the carol books. This image *relates to our Carol Books - brought out for this occasion once every year. They started as free handouts from H C Sleigh's "Golden Fleece" service stations (in 1962) and some of the words read a bit differently in today's English.*



DECK THE HALLS

Deck the halls with boughs of holly,
 Fa la la la la la la la.
 'Tis the season to be jolly,
 Fa la la la la la la la.
 Don we now our gay apparel,
 Fa la la la la la la.
 Troll the ancient Yuletide carol,
 Fa la la la la la la la.

Singing on the Steps

Another much loved tradition is singing on the steps after worship on the Sunday before Christmas. Lots of gather to sing our way all through the little red book and the group gets bigger as the time passes. People stop and listen, they stand on the balcony outside the pub across the road and cheer us on and this year one of the pub visitors brought us a slab of cans of Sprite which we didn't quite get around to sharing. A lovely tradition, watch out for it next year.



> Climate of Hope

Our Christmas Eve pageant 'Climate of Hope' written and directed by Caitlin Mullen-Beagley offered a message of hope and joy. Three prominent and eminent climate scientists who are helping lead the research into the climate emergency set off on a journey to find solutions. Along the way they meet with King Herod, encounter angels and shepherds before finally meeting the Holy Family. They present their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh along with plans for converting the sun's energy, falling water and wind into electricity to the baby Jesus because *'he is to be the saviour of humankind, and we need his help to make sure that the earth isn't damaged any further'*. We heard from reporters, climate refugees and a local tree frog using comedy to highlight the climate emergency and the effect it's having on his habitat and the environment. Ian invited us to pray for the world.



Larry reports from the World Leaders' conference



Barry speaks with the three wise climate scientists



Aaron, Karen & Shaon meet with King Herod



The choir conducted by Elaine Potter offered 'Hope was born this Christmas' and 'Mary did you know?'



The angels meet up with the climate scientists who then discover hydroelectricity



Harry reports on the climate refugee crisis



Barry speaks with climate refugees Chloe, Zoe & Joey



The angels and climate scientists speak with the shepherds and sheep to share the good news of Jesus' birth. However they are more concerned about rain. The wise ones then come up with a plan to use the sun to create solar energy.



Gary reports on the Green Tree frog using comedy to highlight the effect of climate change on his habitat.



Big Russ holds nothing back as he explains what we need to do in response to climate change.



The wise ones meet Mary & Joseph and find inspiration to develop a plan for wind turbines and discover that Mary is going to give birth to the King they seek.



With the support of the three wise scientists Mary & Joseph ask the innkeeper for a place to stay.



Ian invited us to pray for the world.



The baby Jesus is born and the characters from the journey gather round.



Aaron, Karen and Sharon present their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh together with plans for new sources of energy - hydroelectricity, solar power and wind turbines which they hope will make a difference to the challenges of climate change.



Ian closed our pageant with a shared blessing.

Thank you Caitlin

Climate of Hope

written by Caitlin Mullen-Beagley, with the cast



Cast

Minister: Ian Ferguson
CYA Pastor: Dave Hall
Bell ringer: Daniel Clough
Wiseones
Aaron: Nina van Ravenswaaij
Karen: Astrid Gemmel
Sharon: Amelie Brown
Anchors
Larry: Daniel Wheln
Harry: Charlotte Lee
Gary: Leo Gemmel
Reporter
Barry: Sam Coath
Angels: Clara Hall
Rowan Drimmel
Mariel Datt
Holy Family: Tameka Brown
Leo Gemmel
Josh Gesling
Innkeeper: Hudson Coath
Shepherds: Hoth Beny
Greta Drimmel
Anye Kvanskul
King Herod: Patrick Hall
Shepherds: Hoth Beny
Rowan Drimmel
Special Guest: Big Russ - Kirsten Parris
Climate Refugees
Chloe: Harriet Loynd
Zoe: Clementine Loynd
Joey: Matilda Brown
Sheep: Samuel Hall
Hamish Batch
Gabriel Datt
Raphael Datt
Jacob Ly
Rafael Hallinan
Domenic DeLeon
and others
Bible readers: Amelia Ware
Michael Cameron
Maxine Loynd

Crew

Director: Caitlin Mullen-Beagley
Assistant Director: Dave Hall
Choir Director: Elaine Potter
Musical Director: Janet Watson Kruse
Musicians: Tameka Brown
Mikul Denison
Koen Dubrow
Quilan Goff
Ferguson Moorhouse
Rachel Mullen-Beagley
Julia Potter
Production Manager: Saide Cameron
Set Design: Amelia Ware
Sound Technician: Ray Cameron
Laptop Operator: Amelia Ware
Visuals & Videos: Dave Hall
Photography: Chris Magee
Michael Cameron
Pageant Video: Adrian Brown
Front of House: Saide Cameron
Faye Findlay
Catering: Kirsty Bennett
Saide Cameron
Maggie Haines
Indra Liepins
Nicole Lowe

Thank you

On the night Dave thanked everyone who had supported the pageant and in particular: Caitlin (Director), Janet (Music Director), Elaine (Choir Conductor), Saide (Producer) and Ray (Sound Technician) for their work in making the pageant a success.

Thank you to Chris Magee and Michael Cameron for the photos.

To access Chris's full collection (*which offers lots of beautiful photos*) go to:

<https://www.chrismagee.com.au/pageant2019>

Password: climatewise



Many thanks also to Babylon flowers who once again donated the last of their Christmas stock, offering the joy of flowers to take away to all those who came to our Christmas Eve and Day services.



> Christmas Worship



Christmas Eve, Luke 2:1-14, John 1:5,14 We gathered for worship held in darkness waiting in hope and expectation. We turned our attention to the God's Christmas gifts, the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. Having listened to the Christmas story from Luke we lit the Advent candles recalling the Advent prophecies from Isaiah and offering prayers of adoration and confession. Then I offered a further reflection on these gifts as I lay symbols of the gifts of Christmas in the manger and concluded *Hope, peace, joy and love – God's Christmas gifts to us and all the world. May you know them to be yours on this holy night through the birth of Jesus, a vulnerable baby, Word of God, our Saviour. Amen.* You can [read these prayers and reflection here.](#)



Singing 'Mary did you know?'



The gift of Joy - flowers

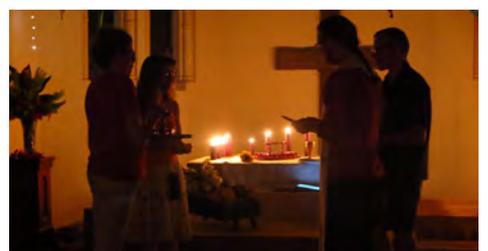


The gift of Love - fruit (mangoes)



Ian lit the Christ Candle close to midnight, received the light to later our carol candles in the pew and then plunged into darkness offered prayers of the people remembering the work of the Christmas Bowl and prepared to celebrate Holy Communion. Ian reminded us ... *At this meal we celebrate God's gift of Jesus and unite ourselves with him and with one another by performing one of the most basic human acts, an act that gives us life, eating together.*

This meal is not just happening here, but is being shared by Christ's people all around the world tonight. We eat a small piece of bread and drink a small cup of juice, remembering that God gives abundant life for all. Come and be fed together with the love born among us tonight.



Christmas Day, John 1:1-5, 14, Isaiah 9:2, 6, Hebrews 1:1-3, Luke 1:46-48, 51-53, Luke 2:1-7, 8-14 Kirsty Bennett welcomed everyone to worship and for the benefit of visitors reminded us of the journey of our Christmas Tree. *We gather in the shade of our Christmas tree, a tree that we have prepared during Advent. We started with a bare trunk, an expression of hope of all that is to come, and heard from Isaiah of swords being turned into ploughshares. Then the tree was covered in leaves and tendrils as we celebrated new growth springing from the root of Jesse. In the 3rd week we added blossoms, new growth and abundance, giving joy. And just on Sunday, all different kinds of fruit bloomed on our tree, the fruit of love, of new life in unlikely places. Today of course we will focus on the Christmas story, and our prayers will be shaped around the hope, peace joy and love of this day.*



Ian and Dave invited the children to come and light the candles and help to retell the Christmas story using costumes from our pageant. We listened to the series of Bible readings listed above that also tell the story of Christmas.



In his sermon '[Christmas - A Family Affair](#)' Ian asked in relation to the birth of a child 'Who did you tell, who would you tell? Who should be the first to know?' He went on to share the story of the birth of his daughter Brenna saying that amidst the chaos of Beth haemorrhaging at one of the hospital and Brenna in ICU at the other end 'I took the opportunity to announce our daughter's birth and my first call was to my own parents in New Zealand.' He commented on the difference in this announcement to that of Jesus' birth - 'less immediate joy, glory, praise and peace' and also the difference in relation to whom the announcement was made. Ian reminded us that the first announcement was made to the shepherds - 'Lowly folk like refugees, menial workers, the homeless.' After speaking briefly on the complex issue of 'traditional family values' attributed to Christianity Ian returned to the Christmas story and the way in which 'Jesus' birth, the gospel of Jesus Christ redefines family'. Returning to the story of Breanna's birth Ian shared that joy did come after the first 24 hours 'But the first announcement came in a void of fearful future uncertainty for me.' Speaking of the void into which Jesus is born, the void of hope Ian concluded 'The joy of Christmas is not that one family has a child but that a child is born who brings hope for the whole family of humanity, the whole family of creation, the whole of God's good earth. And even the first announcement of his birth indicates that in him the ground is shifting, the boundaries of belonging are being realigned. Cultural conventions and power structures that exclude are being broken. Hopes are being raised. It is indeed good news of great joy for all people, for all creation and it starts with those shepherds and it continues with us.'



29/12, [Christmas 1](#), Psalm 148; Matthew 2:13-23; Luke 2:1-20



Ian offered this introduction to our worship: '[Jesus the Christmas Refugee](#)' - Today as our Christmas celebrations continue, we move to Matthew's gospel, the grimmer version of the story, and hear about the flight of the holy family into Egypt – we hear about how the baby Jesus becomes a refugee. Today, at a time



Lighting the candles

Beth telling a story

Mal offering a reading

when there are more refugees in the world than there have ever been in human history, this story is timely. We have refugees here as part of our congregation this morning – refugees from oppressive governments, from war, from poverty and injustice, and refugees from the fires that are devastating our land right now, evacuees, climate refugees.

To help us enter into and reflect upon the refugee experience of Jesus this morning, instead of a sermon, we'll hear a series of different stories through our service, from scripture and from other places. I invite you to listen with open ears and hearts – how is God speaking to you today, what does God want you to hear? Follow the links below to relive them!

- Will Willimon's [Christmas Parable](#), this parable was offered by Beth Shelton, [listen here](#)
- "[Refuge](#)" by Anne Booth and Sam Usher
- [Gerges' story](#), this story was offered by Beth Shelton, [listen here](#)
- [Christmas Refugee Video](#) – millions of Refugees are looking for a safe place to stay – just like Joseph and Mary in the Christmas story (warning: this video contains some disturbing images, as well as some inspiring ones)
- [The President's Christmas message](#)



29/12, Christmas 2 & Epiphany, Psalm 147:12-20, John 1:9 On this final Sunday in the Christmas season Natalie lit the Advent candles one last time at the base of our Advent-Christmas tree reminding us of the Christmas gifts of hope, peace, joy and love.



Valentina and Natalie invited the children to come and listen to Meg reading the Psalm and to prepare reminded them and

us of the three different types of psalms we encounter - Wow!, Thanks! and Oh-No!. Together they worked out that Psalm 147 is a Wow! psalm having noticed lines like God giving 'snow like wool' and 'fills you with the finest wheat'.

Valentina Satvedi-Leydon, member of our congregation and Anabaptist minister offered her sermon '[God with us: the only constant in our inconstant world](#)'. She began by sharing her memories of Christmas and New Year celebrations when she was growing up and the changes that emerged over the years. She reflected further on the changes in our world now commented '*I feel like the world around me, shifts to a new way of being daily. The last several months, weeks, days, it feels like my world view has been constantly altering, that too at a fast pace.*' Reminding us then that '*God is with us*' and commenting on the dis-ease in our world now she wondered '*Where is the security that the Psalmist speaks of?*' in the Psalm for today. Valentina turned our attention to the Gospel reading and the similarities with story of creation (Genesis) - '*It is an articulation of who God is and what God is about. God has come to be with God's people in a very intimate way. An assurance of constancy with the people of God.*' Valentina went on to share her experience as a volunteer pastor with the Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministries responding to the bush fire crisis. And finally as we prepared to celebrate Holy Communion she spoke of the new beginning '*At this table the year turns over, the old comes to an end and there is a new beginning. At this table we bring our brokenness only to be made whole. At this table we come voiceless and weeping only to receive the power to speak and to break forth in praise. At this table we find peace, we find security and the borders come down. At this table love and grace abound. At this table God with us.*'



> Christmas Bowl Appeal



Throughout the seasons of Advent and Christmas we paid attention to the stories of the Act for Christmas Bowl appeal during worship and through our newsletters. The Christmas Bowl (Colin Hunter's beautiful carved bowl) was dedicated during worship on Advent 1. We offered prayers during Prayers for the People, made donations and joyfully made purchases from the Christmas Bowl stalls after worship on 8th & 15th December. Thank you to Glenice Cook, Natalie Papworth, Leanne Salau, Bev and members of the Olive Pesto community who offered us so many delicious



and delightful options to enrich our Christmas celebrations. Together we have donated \$5,476.45 comprising \$2,465.55 from the FUNdraising stalls and \$3,010.90 in donations. Thank you to everyone who made purchases and donations.



Editor's comment - It has been a joy to compile this special edition of the Olive Branch, documenting our journey through Advent and Christmas, sharing the photos and stories and thereby creating a lasting record of our particular celebration of the Advent and Christmas gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Saide Cameron