

Order of Service 20/12/2020 Advent 4 – Love

Advent 2020 – Living God's Future Now
Week 4 – Love

Welcome

Helen

Welcome everyone to Brunswick Uniting Church. This is our fourth service in the season of Advent where we seek to live God's future of love now. At the moment our screens are full of people coming home meeting, hugging, kissing. People happy to be safe and to be with loved ones. But love isn't always happy or easy, saying yes to God, being blessed by God, answering God's call can be difficult. As Mary found, it can mean great joy, but it also can bring hardship and sorrow.

Let's worship the God of love together as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the child of love.

Song – The Angel Gabriel TIS 302

- 1. The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
'All hail,' said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favoured lady, Gloria!*
 - 2. 'for known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honour thee,
thy Son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold;
most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!*
 - 3. Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said,
'my soul shall laud and magnify his holy name':
most highly favoured lady, Gloria!*
 - 4. of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say
'most highly favoured lady'. Gloria!*
-

SONG: [Gabriel's message](#), from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins Religious,

Acknowledgement of Country

Julie Perrin

We acknowledge and respect
the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation,
the traditional custodians of this land
since time immemorial.

We are learning that the land
is not ours to own, but to look after;
and that if we listen,
we may hear in it the calling of the eternal Spirit.

**Responding to this call, we commit ourselves
to work for justice, reconciliation,
and care of the earth.**

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Helen

God so loved the world. The world is created in love. Tiny seed to massive tree, tiny seed to vulnerable child, to woman or man. Everything is here to nurture it and the seed bursts from the ground, the child bursts from the womb, full of hope and promise. All a part of your precious gift of love.

Jesus, lover of my soul. You came to us and lived the life we have. Not God sitting on a throne, but God eating, drinking, playing, walking, learning and loving like us. You are the love that makes the impossible happen and turns the world upside down.

Spirit, breath of love. You breathe into us when we are weary. Imperfect and doubting, you light the spark that inspires us. Even when we turn away you are always constant.

Holy One, Three in One

Forgive us when we fail in love. When we are miserly and mean with our love. When we turn our heads so we don't see or cross the road and walk on the other side. When we only love those who think like us, live like us, look like us.

Holy Three in one, God of David, the Prophets, Hannah and Mary, may we be able to say, with them, "Yes".

Amen

Word of Grace

Helen

So here is the great mystery.

God pushing his way into the world down the birth canal of an unmarried teenager.

But God doesn't make mistakes, God turns the world around, we just don't see with God's eyes.

In Jesus, God is with us, and our sin is forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading 1 – Luke 1:26-38

Lucy Hardman

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

Advent Candle Lighting with the Children

Dave

Exploring God's love expressed in the Nativity scene, with Susannah Denholm lighting the advent candle of love.

Candle Song – Flame of Love

1. *Flame of love come
Holy Spirit
Make in us your
Cradle home
For the Christ child
Who will meet and
Walk with us til
We are grown*

*Flame of love
Holy Spirit
Make in us
Your cradle home*

2. *Light of laughter
Balm in sorrow
You have been our
Cradle home
Called our names in
to the Silence
Flame of love by
You we're known*

*Flame of love
Holy Spirit
Make in us
Your cradle home*

SONG: [Flame of Love](#), Words: Julie Perrin, Music: Helen Burnham & Julie Perrin, Arranged: Julia Potter & Elaine Potter. Used with permission

Gospel Reading 2 – Luke 1:46b-55

Kirsty Brown

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.

Mary says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

What relationship do you have with Mary? Who is she to you? Some of us may have grown up in Catholic, Orthodox or even Islamic traditions where Mary is highly venerated. Or we may have grown up in protestant traditions where that veneration is sometimes held in suspicion. For some Mary is a source of the feminine in our faith, some call her Theotokos, God Bearer, Madonna, Blessed Mother, Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven. Who is Mary for you?

Luke, the gospel writer, gives us more of Mary than any of the other gospels. Here are a few of the ways he presents her – see what connects with you right now.

For Luke, Mary is a prophet of the New Age. The Angel Gabriel tells her that her son will be Christ, the Messiah, the king of an eternal kingdom with power exceeding that of the Roman Emperor who was also called the Son of God. Prophets are those who hear and proclaim the Divine Word and so what has Mary heard from the Angel? What sort of power and authority does she now expect for her son – will he have the tyrannical trappings of Caesar? She tells us in her prophetic song, the Magnificat. There she envisions a reign for her son very different to the Reign of Rome. She prophesies a world turned upside down by a God who brings down the powerful and lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry and empties the rich. "Here am I," she says, "the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to YOUR word, a word that subverts the status quo, and turns the world upside down."

So, for Luke, Mary is the prophet of an upside-down world. And he also portrays her as a model of discipleship for us all to copy. There is a scene later in the gospel where Mary comes to speak to Jesus but can't get to him because of the crowd. Jesus is told, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, wanting to see you." But he said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Your mother is here. No, says the ungrateful son, she has no special privileges as the one who bore me, no greater claim on me than anyone else who hears and does the word of God. But the twist is that Mary, his birth mother, is the absolute epitome of the one who hears and does the Word of God. She is the one who says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

She is our model and inspiration – and we are all called to Mother Christ, to bear his life into the world like her.

She is a prophet, she is a model of discipleship, and according to Luke, she is a pregnant virgin. And now things get tricky – because prophet and disciple are conceptions of Mary not that hard to adapt to the modern world – but her virginity has become one of the fundamentals of fundamentalism so that it is now hard to discuss it in any other than literal terms. But if we interpret it theologically rather than gynaecologically, prophetically rather than scientifically, if we put aside the oppressive ideal of womanhood that it has been used to assert, then what do we get?

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "Too easy, Mary. Check out your relative Elizabeth who has been infertile all her life and now in her old age has also conceived a son, following very closely the well-established model of scripture where there are elderly and infertile women giving birth left right and centre: Sarah the mother of Isaac, Hannah the mother of Samuel, the unnamed mother of Sampson, the unnamed Shunammite woman whose son the prophet Elisha raises from the dead. This is the way God works, Mary, creating life where there can be no life by human expectation, bringing hope of a new beginning where all human hope has died."

Mary's virginity is just another example of this whole crazy biblical life out of death, creation out of chaos theme. It is the first hint in the gospel of the death and resurrection to which the story is leading. God brings a new beginning where we have given up, where new life seems impossible

for us. And yes, it's hard to believe – not because we are supposed to take it literally, but because it says God gives the hope of life and love and peace and joy where all such seem impossible for us. In the face of the impossibility of her own situation Mary says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." She has resurrection faith. What about us? Where might God be working to bring new life through us?

Mary is a prophet of the new upside-down kingdom, she is a model of faithful discipleship, she is a pregnant virgin which means a place in which God's hope lives despite human despair. Luke paints Mary as all that and more, but when we look at this picture of her with our 21st Century eyes, it is hard to ignore things which were not intended to be of issue by Luke. We look and we see a frightened young girl maybe 13 years old, we see a teenage pregnancy in a context in which modern notions of consent are absent. By our standards could Mary even be a survivor of sexual abuse? When Mary says "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word" is that a statement of consent? A better translation is "Here am I, the slave girl of the master". Luke models his portrayal of Mary on other slave girl mothers impregnated by their masters in scripture, particularly Hagar who is also visited by an angel who says "Now, you have conceived in your womb and will bear a son; and you will name him Ishmael" (Gen 16:11) – the same words Gabriel says to Mary about Jesus. Can a slave girl give consent to having a child with her master? – certainly not in our world! Consent for us requires personal agency and equal power. Hagar is Abraham's property with no power. And while Mary says yes to being treated like Hagar, there is nothing even vaguely resembling our concept of consent here.

Luke wants us to understand something powerful and positive and biblical in Mary's acceptance of being a sexual slave to God. But we can't, can we? There are things in this picture of Mary which were not intended by the author but which we can't ignore.

Who is Mary for you?

A great prophet of a new world of peace and justice?

A model of faithful discipleship, responsive to God's call?

A powerful sign of hope, of new creation, of resurrection?

A vulnerable girl navigating the oppressive patriarchy of her age?

Who is Mary for you?

Song – No wind at the Window TIS287

- 1. No wind at the window, no knock on the door;
no light from the lampstand, no foot on the floor;
no dream born of tiredness, no ghost raised by fear:
just an angel and a woman and a voice in her ear.*
- 2. 'Oh Mary, oh Mary, don't hide from my face.
Be glad that you're favoured and filled with God's grace.
The time for redeeming the world has begun;
and you are requested to mother God's son.'*
- 3. This child must be born that the kingdom might come:
salvation for many, destruction for some;
both end and beginning, both message and sign;
both victor and victim, both yours and divine.'*
- 4. No payment was promised, no promises made;
no wedding was dated, no blueprint displayed.*

*Yet Mary, consenting to what none could guess,
replied with conviction, 'Tell God, I say yes.'*

SONG: No wind at the window, by John Bell, from Innkeepers and light sleepers, © 1992 Iona Community/Wild Goose Publications, Scotland Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502, ALSO Reproduced with permission by CCLI license no. 247623

Offering

Through Advent at Offering time we are focusing on the Christmas Bowl appeal. This week we see the work done in Jordan with Syrian refugees especially in the COVID crisis.

Christmas Bowl Video

So this is our Yes. We offer our money for God's work, but mostly we offer ourselves as Mary did. Imperfect, doubting, and tentative, but God makes the impossible happen, and God can work wonders both small and large, through us. So we say Amen in the name of the Baby who is coming.

Prayers of the People

Kirsty Bennett

God of generous love,
Jesus of compassionate love
Spirit of renewing love
On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we pray for love.

We pray that love may spread throughout the world,
Bursting its way into places of conflict,
Seeping into where there is distrust,
Entering places of power,
Spreading like a ripple in a pond until it encompasses all.

We pray that we may love one another
That love may be the beginning and ending of
how we speak *to* each other,
how we write to each other,
how we speak *of* each other.

We pray that we may nurture love,
In our churches,
In our schools,
In our workplaces,
In our supermarkets and petrol stations.
Everywhere.

We pray for
generous love,
selfless love,
thoughtful love,
faithful love,
patient love.

As we live God's future now
this Advent season,
May we live
God's generous love,
Jesus' compassionate love
And the boundless love of the Spirit. Amen.

Notices

Good morning.

I'm Ray Cameron

And I'm Saide Cameron

And this is the BUC News

Wait what are you two doing?

Umm we thought we'd join in the fun

We thought we'd get in the chairs

Get out of our chairs

Ah, sorry not invited

--

I'm Matthew Cameron

And I'm Michael Cameron

And this is the BUC News

Now I think we should start with a recap of the Christmas Services

Great idea. We had the Blue Christmas service last week.

We did indeed and I've heard that it was a very moving service.

So did I and there is now a recorded version of the service up on YouTube.

Excellent. What's next?

The Christmas Eve Pageant at 7pm

I've looked into it since last week and discovered that it's called *drum roll* Pageant Pandemic

Cool title - I like it.

Me too. I really like the way our pageants reflect on what is happening in the world

Yes and at the same time reminds us of the timeless story of the birth of Jesus.

Remember to dress up as your favourite character

A great BUC tradition

And be ready to sing Christmas carols.

Speaking of Christmas Carols we'll be singing more of them at 9pm

Ah yes the Carols & Candlelight service.

Remember to have your Advent worship packs ready.

Yes because we will be lighting the Christ Candle from our Advent worship packs.

Ah candle lighting, my job - every week for months now

And then on Christmas Day worship will be in person at 9:30am.

Followed by a Zoom chat offered from the worship space

There will also be a pre-recorded version of Ian's meditation posted on YouTube on Christmas Day.

I really like that idea.

I bet Mum & Dad will be watching it while driving to Shepparton.

Umm I think Mum will be watching and Dad will be listening.

Definitely, good plan. Note to Dad.

Did you know that our music co-ordinators have provided 13 Christmas Carols for us to sing during the Christmas services?

That's amazing - now remind me - who are the music co-ordinators?

Easy - Elaine Potter, Alistair Hunter, Natalie Sims and Shawn Whelan.

And of course lots of other people have contributed vocal and music tracks.

They have indeed and we now have an incredible bank of approximately 200 songs.

That is even more amazing.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this music ministry.

I heard that something very exciting happened this week.

Tell me more.

A trial of opening the Olive Way happened on Wednesday

That's fantastic. How did it go?

Good as far as I know. It was a bit of a warm up for the Christmas party coming up on Wednesday.

How wonderful. I guess our Olive Way Co-ordinator Peter Blair is looking for volunteers.

Yes he is. Look up the details in the Olive Press if you want to get involved.

I've just remembered that Mum & Dad usually go to Stewart Lodge Carols in the week before Christmas

Yes but it's not happening this year.

True so instead the Justice & Mission committee organized gift bags of biscuits with handwritten cards.

That sounds lovely.

I think it would be good to thank all the people involved in this gift giving activity.

Yes and all the contributors to the Act for Peace Christmas Bowl Appeal.

Thank you!!

You can of course still make a donation to the Appeal

There's a dedicated BUC page, the link is in the Olive Press.

Now what's happening after Christmas?

Glad you asked. We'll be back worshipping in person for the 9:30am service.

It will be so good to be seeing people again.

Of course things will be different.

How so?

Remember - social distancing, number limits, face masks

Ah yes and there is also the live stream trial happening too.

Yes details are being worked out.

Hmm what else.

Ian, Peter and Dave are all taking various lengths of leave during January.

They are - all the details are in the Olive Press.

We'll be welcoming Narelle Collas, one of our Presbytery ministers to preach on 10th January.

Yes and then Graeme Garrett, a member of our congregation on 17th January.

And Carlyne Nunn, a former member of our congregation on 24th January.

Oh and the Walking Together group will be planning and leading the service with Ian on 31st January.

Another big month.

Yes and if you can help out on the worship roster that would be excellent

Mum will be sending it out this week.

And I think we're done - hopefully for good!

Join Ian for the post worship Zoom chat

Check out the Olive Press on our website for full details of all the news.

Goodbye and thanks for listening.

Coughs

That sounded a bit odd.

Sending Song – Cantic of the turning MV120

*1. My soul cries out with a joyful shout
that the God of my heart is great,
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things
that you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,
and my weakness you did not spurn,
So from east to west shall my name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?*

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn!*

2. *Though I am small, my God, my all,
you work great things in me,
And your mercy will last from the depths of the past
to the end of the age to be.
Your very name puts the proud to shame,
and to those who would for you yearn,
You will show your might, put the strong to flight,
for the world is about to turn.*
3. *From the halls of power to the fortress tower,
not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware for your justice tears
ev'ry tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor shall weep no more,
for the food they can never earn;
There are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed,
for the world is about to turn.*
4. *Though the nations rage from age to age,
we remember who holds us fast:
God's mercy must deliver us
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.
This saving word that our forebears heard
is the promise which holds us bound,
'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God,
who is turning the world around*

SONG: [Canticle of the turning](#), from [More Voices](#), United Church of Canada, Woodlake Publishing Inc.
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Blessing

Ian and Helen

Helen:

Loving God, this Advent time we remember your gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. You call us to give generously and love extravagantly in response to all you have given us. We give back to you all that we are, all that we have and all that we will be, through your love freely given to us.

Ian:

Go with God's love shining in your hearts. Look with eyes of compassion, be alert to the promptings of God's Spirit and the unfolding purposes of God in your life and the lives of those around you.

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

Maranatha: Come, O come Emmanuel!

In the name of our God Source, Word and Breath of Love.

Amen

Thank You

Liturgist:
Helen Burnham

Children's time and Advent
candle
Dave Hall (Pastor:
Children, Youth and Young
Adults)
Susannah Denholm

Acknowledgement of
Country:
Julie Perrin

Bible readings:
Lucy Hardman
Kirsty Brown

Reflection:
Ian Ferguson (Minister of
the Word)

Prayers of the People:
Kirsty Bennett

Musicians:
Elaine Potter (co-ordinator)
Alistair Hunter
Richard Potter

Advent Song -
Flame of Love
Julie Perrin
Helen Burnham
Julia Potter
Elaine Potter

Offering Video:
Act for Peace Christmas
Bowl Appeal
christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au

Notices:
Matthew Cameron
Michael Cameron
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron
Lydia Jacka
Emma Norris

Images:
St Francis
<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/3f/5e/25/3f5e255486f47c70b778e9dcf00516de.jpg>
<https://scroll.in/article/947683/the-universal-image-of-baby-jesus-in-his-manger-was-created-only-1200-years-after-his-death>
<https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/once-more-jesus-was-not-born-in-a-stable/>

Images of The
Annunciation
Sandro Botticelli
Peter Paul Rubens
Titian
Giulio Cesare Procaccini
Fra Angelico
Dan Thompson
John Collier
Henry Tanner
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Mérode Altarpiece
Maurice Denis
Phoebe Anna Traquair
Ambrogio Lorenzetti
Matthias Stom
Liviu Dumitrescu
Gottfried Helnwein
James B. Janknegt
Masolino da Panicale

Production:
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron
Ian Ferguson
Dave Hall
Lydia Jacka

Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with you according to your word.