

Order of Service 25/12/20

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” Luke 2:14

Getting ready

Ian

(After signing in) please find a place and take a seat as we prepare to begin our worship.
Ask people to check they are spread out.
Keep masks on to sing, don't feel obliged to stand.
Recorded music today – back to live music next week.

Call to Worship

Ian

Breathe deep...

*I bring you good news of great joy for all the people:
to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,
who is Christ, the Lord.*

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace...

The peace of the Prince of Peace be always with you. **And also with you.**

Let us worship God and sing.

Please remain seated as we sing and welcome the Word.

Song: O Come All Ye Faithful TIS304

-
- O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him born the king of angels:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*
 - True God of true God, Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father, begotten, not created:*
-

Please stand.

Ian

-
- Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
sing all ye citizens of heaven above,
'Glory to God, glory in the highest':*
 - Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father now in flesh appearing:*
-

SONG: [O Come all ye faithful](#), from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins Religious, PUBLIC DOMAIN

Welcome and Introduction

It is so lovely to be here together -
in person, celebrating the coming of the Christ child on this Christmas day.
Parts of our service will be familiar to you and others a bit different
As we worship together, but sit apart,
As we sing, but to recorded music,
As we sit down a bit more, as it can be hard to sing with masks on,
And as we adjust to being here, and not at home in front of a device.

As we embrace this new way of being together,
We remember that the baby Jesus turned everything upside down,
that a new way of doing things dawned with his birth, and we grab hold of this new way too.

Acknowledgement of Country

Jane Allardice

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.***

Christmas Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Kirsty

Let us pray:

On this Christmas morning,
Once more we pause, we wait, we hope.

We look to you,
Christ child
New life
Hope for us all.

We look to you,
Small, Holy One
Prince of Peace
Who welcomes all.

We look to you,
Vulnerable and precious
Source of joy
Bringing joy amidst adversity.

We look to you,
Son of God
Born among us
Love like no other.

We adore you.

Forgive us
When we do not live your future now
When we live without hope
When we do not work for peace
When we do not live with joy
When we do not love each other and our planet.

Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Kirsty

God of hope, peace and joy and love,
You come to us today and every day
And so we can say in confidence:
Our sin is forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Candle lighting with the Children

Ian and Dave

A conversation about filming, interruptions, inconvenience and the celebration of Jesus' first breath – the breath of God breathing into our world in a new way. Breathing hope, peace, joy and love.

Children light the Advent and Christ Candles

Song: *Once in Royal David's city, TiS 312*

Ian

-
- 1. Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed
where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.*
 - 2. He came down to earth from heaven who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall;
with the poor, despised and lowly lived on earth our Saviour holy.*
 - 3. And through all his wondrous childhood, day by day like us he grew;
he was little, weak, and helpless, tears and smiles like us he knew;
and he feels for all our sadness, and he shares in all our gladness.*
 - 4. And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love,
for that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.*
 - 5. Not in that poor lowly stable, with the oxen standing by,
we shall see him: but in heaven, set at God's right hand on high,
when his children gather round bright like stars, with glory crowned.*
-

SONG: Once in royal David's city, by Cecil Frances Alexander,
from Together in Song, Harper Collins *Religious*, PUBLIC DOMAIN

(Hebrews 1:1-3, Isaiah 9:2, 6, Lk 2:1-7, 8-14)

Voice 1: The Prophet Isaiah says:

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... For 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.

Voice 2: The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

Voice 1: From the Gospel according to Luke.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And 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.

Voice 2: In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"

Voice 1 & 2: For these Words of Witness and for Christ the Word

Thanks be God

Reflection

Ian

Friends, for me Christmas is, in large part, about the singing – is that true for you? – all those special songs that we only sing at this time of year. Of course, there are some Christmas songs that if I never heard them again I wouldn't be unhappy – Jiggle Bell Rock comes to mind and any song with snow in it. But there are other songs that I couldn't do without, songs that evoke Christmas as strongly as the smell of pine needles in the living room – songs that tell the story of what Xmas is all about, but also help form its cultural history and substance for me.

Music can take us far and deep into memory and feeling, can't it? When I was young I was a boy soprano in my school choir and we sang the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah for an ABC TV broadcast. As a result, that music is in me deep – I can't sing the soprano part anymore, but each year when I first hear Christmas music being piped in the supermarket (usually around mid-November) I immediately download the Messiah to my phone and play the whole thing on constant repeat until Christmas, thereby bathing myself in my childhood Christmas memories and pleasures.

Christmas in the bible has lots of songs in it too. The extended Christmas story as told in Luke's gospel contains Mary's song, Zechariah the father of John the Baptist's song and Simeon the Prophet's song. And then there is that one tiny little song, two short lines of poetry that come at the climax of today's reading with the announcement of Jesus' birth: *and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and singing...* what? Here's Handel's version (from 00:23-1:00) "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men" (assuming that men here includes women and anyone else who identifies as a human being).

All the lyrics in Handel's Messiah are quotations from the King James version of the bible – the first official English translation from the year 1611. We use a modern translation of the bible here, one that updates the archaic language of the King James. However, when Glenice read those verses to us today, we heard not just an update of the language, but a quite different meaning: *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours!* And quite frankly, apart from the archaic non-inclusive use of maleness for humanity, I much prefer the King James version. We've got "all humankind" verses "the people divinely favoured by God". It's Universal vs Conditional, Inclusive vs Exclusive. The modern and, according to biblical scholars, correct translation leads us to ask who is favoured by God and who is out of favour? What a jolly question to be asking on Christmas Day! Who is in and who is out with God? Now spoiler alert! – the answer is no one is left out, no-one is excluded. But how do we know that? – especially given that so much of Christianity is conducted in an exclusive way, making judgements about insiders and outsiders on the basis of moral uprightness, sexual orientation, believing the right things in the right way.

It all makes me wonder to what extent God really is like Santa. We all know that Santa only brings gifts to good children, only the deserving. Although, that being said, I have heard children being threatened with Santa's moral judgment upon them, but I'm not aware of a single example of Santa ever following through on any of those threats. Anyone here ever get a lump of coal from Santa?

Luke's gospel seems to say that peace on earth comes only to those whom God favours, only some get to experience that peace. And that taps unhelpfully into stereotypes of judgemental Christians nominating those whom God approves of and I don't like it – and the fact that it is sung by a choir of angels only adds insult to injury. But as with every single word in the bible, context is everything. Let's jump back a few short verses before this song: *Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for...? ALL THE PEOPLE.* Christmas joy is for ALL the people.

The bible is frequently misread as saying that God privileges some people or nations over others. But that misreading comes as a result of the fact that God's word of world transforming peace didn't come to everyone at once, but to some people first and everyone else through them. It's like the way we always acknowledge the traditional indigenous custodians of our land here at Brunswick Uniting Church, the First Peoples. Not because they are more privileged, more favoured – on the contrary – but because they were the first to love this amazing land which we are still working out how to share peacefully with them.

The bible is misread when its overarching theme of universal peace is overlooked. And it's there from the start. God said to Noah and his family: *"When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember my everlasting covenant of peace that is between me and you AND EVERY living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."* God said to Abraham and Sarah: *"I will bless you, ... and in you ALL the families of the earth shall be blessed with peace."* Jesus inherits this

blessing – as God says through the prophet Isaiah: *I will give you as a light to ALL the nations, that my salvation, my peace, may reach to the end of the earth.* Even as far as Australia.

But what about all the wrongdoers, sinners, unjust and evil people out there? – the ones I don't like – doesn't God rightly have a burning pit of exclusion and rejection for them? Well actually when we read the gospels, we find that the so-called sinners and tax collectors, the outsiders and excluded ones of Jesus' world are the MOST favoured. Jesus says, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Who is excluded from God's favour, from the love that reaches out to the world from the Bethlehem stable? – not one person, not one creature, not one atom of earth's goodness. Which isn't to say that God's peace is simply just rolling effortlessly on to encompass the earth like a coronavirus. No, there is much in us and around us that fights against the light of peace shining from the manger. We do make hard divisions between insiders and outsiders, those we favour and those we don't, those who look, think and act like us and those who don't. And in our heart of hearts, we may not always feel worthy of God's love, we may feel distant from God's peace. But Jesus comes not to judge us, not to reject us, but to heal our brokenness, to love the world into wholeness.

So, let's join in the angels' song today, their great carol of universal love. Let's sing out the joy of the birth of peace for every creature, for the whole earth. Let's sing it with our living into every place of division and exclusion until God's will is done on earth as in heaven and the glorious light of peace shines in every heart.

Come, O come Emmanuel. Be born in us today. Amen

Song: *Angels from the realms of glory, TiS 309*

-
- 1. Angels, from the realms of glory, wing your flight over all the earth;
you who sang creation's story, now proclaim Messiah's birth:
come and worship Christ, the newborn King,
come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.*
 - 2. Shepherds, in the field abiding, watching o'er the flocks by night,
God with us is now residing; yonder shines the infant Light:*
 - 3. Wise men, leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations, you have seen his natal star:*
 - 4. Though an infant now we view him, he shall fill his Father's throne,
gather all the nations to him: every knee shall then bow down:*
-

SONG: [Angels from the realms of glory](#), by James Montgomery, from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins Religious, PUBLIC DOMAIN

Prayers of the People

God with us, Emanuel,

Kirsty

During Advent we have shared your hope peace joy and love through the Christmas Bowl, as we focused on the need for girls' education in Afghanistan when we visited Rohingya people in the Jamtoli refugee camp in Bangladesh.

as we learned of the importance of reintegrating refugees in Sri Lanka and saw the work done in Jordan with Syrian refugees. In all these places, the coronavirus has had a devastating impact.

This Christmas Day we travel to Zimbabwe, where here too, the coronavirus has left people already devastated by drought, disaster and inflation struggling to feed their children.

We pray for new life and new beginnings in these places, and in all the world where people are struggling to live and stay well

We pray for new life and new beginnings in our community too, as we grieve, as we live with illness, as we face uncertainty. Mary's child, as you come to us this day may we know your unbounding love, your joy, your peace and your hope, and live God's future now.
Amen

Response

Ian

In response to God's Christmas love, I invite you to bring the prayers of your hearts to these three stations:

- Light a taper candle for the light that shines from the Bethlehem manger – what are your prayers for light in dark places today?
- Place a gum leaf in the baptism font, the waters of birth and new life – what are your prayers for new beginnings, new hope, new possibilities today?
- Place an offering for the work of the Xmas Bowl – what are your prayers for peace and justice the world today?

SONG: Born in the night TIS323

-
1. *Born in the night, Mary's child,
a long way from your home;
coming in need, Mary's child,
born in a borrowed room.*
 2. *Clear shining light, Mary's child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world, Mary's child,
dawn on our darkened day.*
 3. *Truth of our life, Mary's child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true, Mary's child,
go to your cross of wood.*
 4. *Hope of the world, Mary's child,
you're coming soon to reign;
King of the earth, Mary's child,
walk in our streets again.*
-

SONG: Born in the night, by Geoffrey Ainger, from Together in Song, Harper Collins *Religious*,
Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502;

Blessing and Sending

May there be a place for you
at the side of the Christ Child this Christmas:
a place of hope,
where you are
encompassed by love,
filled with joy,
and moved to peace.

Go in peace with a blessing
from the Source of Christmas love
through the child in the manger
by the Spirit who sings joy in us.

Sending Song

Song: Joy to the World TIS 268

-
1. *Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*
 2. *Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns; let us our songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*
 3. *He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.*
-

SONG: [Joy to the world](#), by Isaac Watts, 1674-1748,
from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins Religious, PUBLIC DOMAIN

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” Luke 2:14

Worship team

Liturgist: Kirsty Bennett	Prayers of the People: Kirsty Bennett	Alistair Hunter Jessica Kvensakul Catherine Leslie
Acknowledgement of Country Jane Allardice	Christmas Carol Coordinators: Elaine Potter Natalie Sims Shawn Whelan	Elaine Potter Julia Potter Annie Quail Natalie Sims Amelia Ware Daniel Whelan Shawn Whelan
Bible readings: Barry Cook Glenice Cook	Vocalists: Simone Alesich Hazel Bluer Helen Burnham Saide Cameron Brad Coath Glenice Cook Stephanie Dykes Ian Ferguson Georgie Fraser	Musicians: Jane Allardice Elaine Potter Richard Potter Natalie Sims Shawn Whelan Organ from smallchurchmusic.com
Children’s Time: Dave Hall (Children, Youth & Young Adult Pastor) Ian Ferguson (Minister of the Word)		
Reflection: Ian Ferguson (Minister of the Word)		