

THE OLIVE BRANCH

**Advent & Christmas 2020 Brunswick Uniting Church Congregation
Worship - 9:30 am**

This special edition of the Olive Branch focuses solely on our journey through Advent and Christmas offering links to prayers, sermons, audio recordings of Christmas Carols and recorded services.



> Advent Litany

The Advent Litany is an invitation to reflect on our hope in God's future. We turned our attention to the psalms and the Gospel. The young people lit the candles for us each week and the litany was reshaped for Blue Christmas and Christmas Eve.

Advent Wreath, created by Anya Kvensakul

Advent 1, 29th November

The psalmist cries out
*Restore us, O God of hosts;
Let your face shine,
that we may be saved.* Psalm 80:7



We pause, we wait, we hope.
In the darkest of times
we glimpse God's future.
We look for signs of hope.
We claim this hope for ourselves
and for all the earth.
God's future is a future of hope.
We light this candle for hope.



Advent 3, 13th December

The psalmist exults
*Then our mouth was filled
with laughter,
and our tongue
with shouts of joy* Psalm 126:2a



We pause, we wait, we hope.
We emerge from a long time of sorrow
We are called to a time of rejoicing
Let us lay down our burdens
and sing out with joy.
God's future is a future of joy.
We light this candle for joy.



Advent 2, 6th December

The psalmist declares
*Steadfast love
and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace
will kiss each other.* Psalm 85:10



We pause, we wait, we hope.
We walk together through
the wilderness of loss.
We listen for the voice of peace.
Help us to work for peace for
all people and all creation.
God's future is a future of peace.
We light this candle for peace.



Advent 4, 20th December

The psalmist sings
*I will sing of your steadfast love ...
Your faithfulness is as firm
as the heavens* Psalm 89:1a,2b



We pause, we wait, we hope.
We hear Mary's song of love
in our hearts
We are caught up in that love.
May our spirits rejoice
and our hearts sing with her.
God's future is a future of love.
We light this candle for love.



> Advent Garden



Our worship space featured an Advent Garden providing a beautiful focus for candle lighting for our morning recorded services and afternoon in-person services. Amelia Ware and Ian Ferguson created the garden using plants loaned by Faye Findlay, Helen Burnham, Philippa Hamilton-Smith and Saide Cameron.



> 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 come
Holy Spirit
Make in us your
Cradle home*

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

*Flame of love come
Holy Spirit
Make in us your
Cradle home*

Julie Perrin wrote [Flame of Love](#) for Advent 2016 and it fit our theme of hope beautifully for 2020. Our thanks to Julie for the song and to Julia Potter for the [recording provided for worship](#).

Julie Perrin talks about Flame of Love, 2016.

In this song we sing our gladness to God as we ask for the mystery of God's presence to be with us. The first verse is calling to the Holy One and is written from the point of view of a child –

imagining the Holy Spirit as a flame that warms our hearts and makes a home there like a cradle for the Christ child. We remember Jesus was once a baby who like us needed cradling and rocking. And as we make our hearts ready, Jesus' presence grows in us and he walks alongside us as we keep growing.

The second verse is written from the point of view of being an adult looking out on their lives and recognising all the ways the Holy One has been their light and warmth and laughter and comfort.

This song reminds us to make our hearts ready, to keep them open.

We sing the words 'Holy Spirit' in two ways: at the beginning of the song we sing the word Spirit as if we are reaching out and longing for God. In the refrain we sing the word 'Spirit' quickly, like the flicker of a flame. Sometimes we long for God and other times we feel God is with us as a quick bright presence.

Helen Burnham made the refrain and Julia and Elaine Potter did a brilliant job of interpreting my voice recording and arranging it into a singable song! Warm thanks to these musicians for their gracious expertise

Words: Julie Perrin

Music: Helen Burnham & Julie Perrin

Arranged: Julia Potter & Elaine Potter

> Worshipping on site

On site worship at 2pm was offered by invitation during November and then open to the congregation during December. Each Sunday a small number gathered to worship. Services were led by Ian Ferguson and Helen Burnham using a modified liturgy from the morning service together with recorded songs and Christmas Carols. We also trialled live streaming worship on 13th & 20th December.

It was good to be back in this small way which also served as preparation for returning to morning worship from Christmas Day onwards.



> Advent Worship



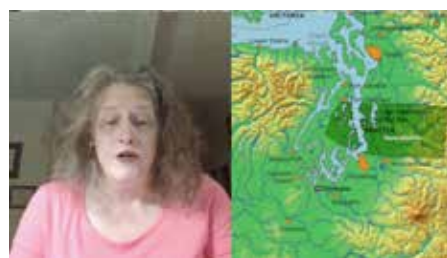
29/11, [Advent 1-Hope](#), **Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37** Amelia Ware invited us to ask ourselves what hope looks like in our world and to explore how we can wait in an active state of hope, knowing that God's future is future of hope. For this first Sunday of Advent Dave Hall shared the tradition of the Advent wreath and introduced Anya's wreath.



For his reflection Ian asked '[What does hope look like?](#)' and offered a picture of hope - *an RNA strand*. He spoke of endings and beginnings, apocalyptic times and literature, vaccines and waiting. Ian reminded us that our waiting is not passive, that he is '*actively seeking with others to nurture a healthy community so that people don't die before the vaccine comes*' and commented that this is '*a good illustration of the apocalyptic hope that Jesus offers us in the gospel*'. Concluding he answered his opening question '*Hope looks like compassionate love in harsh suffering, warm light in cold darkness, communal peace in divided brokenness. Hope looks like life's new beginning in death's hard ending. It looks like you, working faithfully in the waiting.*'



[Read the Order of Service](#) or [watch again on YouTube](#)



6/12, [Advent 2-Peace](#), **Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8** Dave Hall invited us worship God together, remembering that God's future is a future of peace and God's future is not distant, it is here with us today. Later with the children, noting that 6th December is the feast day of St. Nicholas, shared some of his story and the how the tradition of hanging stockings came to be.

Ian's reflection '[Peace, Salaam, Shalom](#)', was an invitation to reflect on peace in the time of pandemic. He shared Sonia's story (of



having to sell her cafe amidst the pandemic), spoke of John the Baptist, the meaning of Peace or Shalom in Hebrew - a vision of building towards a state of wholeness and introduced us to King Ahaziah of Israel and Elijah the Tishbite. Ian reminded us that *'biblical prophets not only cry against the brokenness of the world, but also impel us towards the building of shalom'*. Concluding he said *'John points to Jesus and says here is the way, the way from brokenness to peace.'* Commenting on our fast from the feast during the pandemic he placed the empty plate and cup in our Advent garden - *a sign of our hope, a sign of peace. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. Fulfil our hope of peace for all creation. Amen*



[Read the Order of Service](#) or [watch again on YouTube](#)



13/12, Advent 3-Joy, Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11; Psalm 126 Natalie Sims invited us to focus on joy - the joy that is ours, even when we are still waiting, even in the midst grief and suffering. Dave shared the joy of the Christmas tree and the link to tree of Abraham and Sarah with Jesus as the star.



Ian invited us to explore *'Joy in a dry place'*. He explained that Negev (as sung in the psalm) means dry and shared the story of the filling of Lake Eyre in 2019. He commented that the psalm is full of joy, a song of memory and hope and noted that he shares the psalmist's ambivalence about joy as we emerge from the pandemic. He asked *'What about you? – is there joy in this time of emergence for you? – what other feelings does joy contend with?'*, and went to explore the struggles with the experience of joy in our times. He concluded *'May we know joy today, the quality of God's presence with us, like birds flocking to the waters. Not as a trite attempt to be cheerful despite difficult circumstances, but as an attitude of hope in the love of God that falls and flows like longed for renewing rain in the dry places of the heart.'*



[Read the Order of Service](#) or [watch again on YouTube](#)



20/12, [Advent 4-Love](#), [Luke 1:26-38](#); [Luke 1:46b-55](#) Helen Burnham invited us to worship the God of love together as we prepared to celebrate the birth of the child of love reminding us that 'love isn't always happy or easy, saying yes to God, being blessed by God, answering God's call can be difficult'. Dave explored God's love as expressed in the Nativity scene.



Ian's reflection began with the question '[Who is Mary to you?](#)'. He spoke of the many traditions surrounding Mary and shared a few of the ways that Luke the gospel writing presents her - a prophet of the New Age, the prophet of an upside-down world, a model of discipleship. He discussed Mary's virginity and asked 'Where might God be working to bring new life through us?' And he invited us to look at Mary through our 21st century eyes with our notions of consent. Ian concluded saying '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.' And repeated his opening question 'Who is Mary for you?'



> Advent Packs

[Read the Order of Service](#) or [watch again on YouTube](#)



To bring us together through the Advent and Christmas seasons the worship committee developed Advent packs. Dave Hall commissioned Anya Kvensakul to create a nature based Advent wreath which was photographed and used as a setting for the candles. Purple tealights and small white candles were purchased. Ray & Saide Cameron printed the resources and put the packs together.

The Advent packs included: the wreath setting, candles, a copy of the Advent Litany, the words to Flame of Love and the story of the song, Advent and Christmas worship postcards and an invitation to contribute to the Act for Peace Christmas Bowl appeal.



The majority of the packs were delivered within the space of a week - in time for Advent 1 on 29th November. Thank you to all the deliverers and



thank you for all the lovely feedback we received in response to the packs.

> Blue Christmas

The season of Christmas began with [Blue Christmas](#) on **Wednesday 16th 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. We gently acknowledged the months of waiting and celebrated the hope that we have in God’s future, a future of hope, peace, joy and love, always love.



Ray Cameron offered the Advent Litany with responses offered by Saide Cameron acknowledging the challenges of our year and that God waits with us in our hoping, works with us showing us the way to peace, laughs with us in the joyful abundance of creation and invites us with Mary to be a people of love, [a people of God’s future now](#).



Hannah Friebel offered a dance to the ‘Does your heart break?’ by the Brilliance as a prayerful offering to God, capturing the grief she had experienced during the year and her belief in God’s transformation.

Ian invited us to a time of lighting candles for the prayers of our hearts placing a cross on the table as sign of hope, pouring water into a bowl as a sign of peace, placing a flower as a sign of joy and the empty communion plate and cup as signs of Christ’s self-giving love.



The service was offered in person in the worship space with a recorded version posted later for those who wished to access it in this way.

[Read the Order of Service](#) or [watch again on YouTube](#)

> Christmas Carols

The worship committee began planning worship for the Advent & Christmas seasons way back in September. One of the big decisions we made was to ask our music coordinators - Alistair Hunter, Elaine Potter, Natalie Sims and Shawn Whelan to record multi-voice recordings for 11 Christmas Carols. This was a huge undertaking as they continued to organise and provide recorded music for our regular Sunday services. The outcome of this project was a stunning gift of beautiful recordings which were used multiple times across five services. We hope you enjoyed them. Thank you to Alistair, Elaine, Natalie and Shawn and to everyone who recorded and sent tracks in to be part of this. You can listen to and download the [recordings from Dropbox](#). Please contact Saide, 0407 096 743 if you have any difficulties accessing this link.

Musicians:

James Balsillie
Ryan Kambouris
Catherine Leslie
Bronte Potter
Elaine Potter
Richard Potter

Courtney Rohde

Natalie Sims
Shawn Whelan
Organ from [small-churchmusic.com](#)

Vocalists:

Simone Alesich
James Balsillie
Hazel Bluer
Helen Burnham
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron

Brad Coath

Collen Coath
Glenice Cook
Stephanie Dykes
Ian Ferguson
Georgie Fraser
Alistair Hunter

Jessica Kvensakul

Catherine Leslie
Elaine Potter
Julia Potter
Annie Quail
Courtney Rohde
Kate Scull

Natalie Sims

Geoff Thompson
Amelia Ware
Daniel Whelan
Shawn Whelan

> Pageant Pandemic



Caitlin Mullen-Beagley with extensive support from Dave Hall brought us the joy of the pageant in the form of a movie. Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem encountering the challenges of registration, border passes and finding a place to stay.



The angels (Michael, Gabriel and Raphael) oversaw the proceedings through Zoom with one angel trapped on earth due to travel restrictions.



The shepherds (Shan, Shawn and Seamus) wearing face masks expressed their frustrations about the need for work permits and children being stuck at home in the midst of the lockdown.



The Wise Ones (Winona, Wesley and Winston) received a call from Herod asking for news of the baby and offering them unlimited travel passes.

The angels eventually connected with the shepherds on Zoom bringing their news of great joy. Mary and Joseph spoke to the Innkeepers (Ian, Isobel and Isaac) trying to find a place to stay. Thankfully Isaac offered them a room. The Wise Ones had a dream warning them against speaking with Herod.



Everyone joyfully gathered on Zoom to welcome the baby Jesus with gifts of tim tams, corn thins and locally made gelati being delivered by Uber Eats.



We loved the virtual choir items '[Goin to Bethlehem](#)' by Jay Althouse to begin the pageant and '[Dream a Dream](#)' by Shirley Murray to conclude it. Thank you to Elaine and Julia Potter for organizing and arranging the items from many voices.

Cast:

Welcome / liturgy: Daniel Whelan
Narrator: Astrid Gemmell
Mary: Sophia Twigg
Joseph: Sam Coath
Angel Michael: Clara Hall
Angel Gabriel: Thomas U'Ren
Angel Raphael: Amelie Brown
King Herod: Nina van Ravenswaaij
Shan the Shepherd: Anya Kvensakul
Shawn the Shepherd: Greta Drimmel
Seamus the Shepherd: Rowan Drimmel
Winona the Wise One: Harriet Loynd
Winston the Wise One: Hudson Coath
Wesley the Wise One: Clementine Loynd
Ian the Innkeeper: Patrick Hall
Isobel the Innkeeper: Charlotte Lee
Isaac the Innkeeper: Matilda Brown

Additional angels:

Kate and Dominic

Pageant Writer and Director:

Caitlin Mullen-Beagley

Producer and Editor:

Dave Hall (Pastor: Children, Youth and Young Adults)

Assistant Director:

Tameka Brown

Filming:

Chris Magee www.chrismagee.com.au
Dave Hall
Caitlin Mullen-Beagley
Frances Harding
Joanne van Ravenswaaij

Footage of lambs:

Amelia Ware

Production assistance:

Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron

Planning team:

Saide Cameron
Rev Ian Ferguson
Dave Hall
Caitlin Mullen-Beagley

Music Coordinator:

Elaine Potter

Vocalists:

Simone Alesich
Hazel Bluer
Helen Burnham
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron
Glenice Cook
Stephanie Dykes
Ian Ferguson
Alistair Hunter
Jessica Kvensakul
Catherine Leslie
Elaine Potter
Kate Scull
Natalie Sims
Geoff Thompson
Daniel Whelan
Shawn Whelan

Musicians:

Jane Allardice
Ryan Kambouris
Bronte Potter
Elaine Potter
Richard Potter

Mixing:

Elaine Potter
Julia Potter

Catering:

Brown-Majors

Best boys / dolly grips:

Dave Miller
Brad Coath
Adrian Brown
Andrew Edwards

Uber eats bag:

BUC Student House

Icicle Tricycle:

the best icecream in Brunswick

Worship space design:

Amelia Ware
Helen Burnham
Saide Cameron
Faye Findlay
Philippa Hamilton-Smith

Images:

Rev Ian Ferguson

<https://christchurchpettswood.org.uk/event/nativity-play-service/>

diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu

<https://www.learnreligions.com/caesar-augustus-first-roman-emperor-701063>

<https://chrisgoringe.net/2020/12/traveling-to-bethlehem/>

<https://geography.bible-history.com/a/downloads/-/c926425b3dd8cc37/179f41ba83301074>

The Pageant is now unlisted on YouTube but [can be accessed here](#).

> Christmas Eve



24/12 [Christmas Eve](#), Luke 2:1-14; John 1:1-5,14

This year our 11:30pm candle light and Holy Communion service was replaced with a recorded service offered at 9:30pm. We worshipped together in our homes as had been doing for many months - one last time in this way! We sang along to the Christmas Carols recorded by the musicians and lit the candles from our Advent packs.



As we moved towards the closing of a year unlike anything we have experienced before we celebrated the birth of Jesus reflecting on the hope, peace, joy and love that shapes God's future. Saide Cameron invited us on a journey through the year, to take a moment to claim our part in [living God's future now](#). We moved through the bush fire season asking 'What are your hopes for this coming year, for the environment, for people on the margins, for yourself and your family?' Then into the pandemic acknowledging the reshaping of our ministries and our call to add our voices to Jesus's message of peace. We remembered finding joy in the dark



winter months of lockdown through new ways of gathering, of worshipping God, of finding moments of connection. We finished reminding ourselves of the powerful force of loved that has sustained us through the year. The prayers woven through the reflection were both an invitation to live in God's future and a plea for forgiveness.



Ian lit the Christ candle and we lit ours at home too. After the Christmas Bowl focused Prayers of the People were offered by Ray Cameron Ian blessed us on our way into this holy night.

[Read the order of service](#) or [watch again on YouTube](#)

> Christmas Day

25/12 [Christmas Day](#), **Hebrews 1:1-3, Isaiah 9:2, 6, Luke 2:1-7, 8-14**

Kirsty Bennett welcomed us to worship in person. She acknowledged the differences in our gathering and reminded us 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.

Ian and Dave enjoyed a conversation with the young people 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.

Ian offered his reflection '[All the people](#)' during the service and as a pre-recorded video for those of us who could not attend worship. He began by commenting '*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.*' He shared his experience of singing the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah as a boy soprano and reflected on the modern vs archaic language of the different translations of the text, the way in which the modern translation appears to exclude people. He noted that '*The bible is frequently misread as saying that God privileges some people or nations over others. ... The bible is misread when its overarching theme of universal peace is overlooked. And it's there from the start.*' Ian concluded affirming that '*not one person, not one creature, not one atom of earth's goodness*' and invited us to '*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*'.



[Read the Order of Service](#)

> Christmas Season

Worship by live stream

After Christmas Day we returned to worshipping on site on Sunday mornings with our services also being live streamed from 3rd January. The worship committee is overseeing this trial and we are grateful to Ray and David Cameron for their equipment, expertise and extensive research that is underpinning the trial. The worship will committee will review the trial on 2nd February and then again after Holy Week. We recognize that there will be glitches along the way and value all feedback about your experiences of participating in the service live at 9:30am or by accessing the recording at a later date. A brief look at the number of views indicate that the service from 3rd January was viewed over 200 times and 10th January over 100.



27/12 [Christmas 1](#), Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:21-40

Ian welcomed us to worship inviting us to breathe together as we prepared to praise God. We sang the recorded Christmas Carols one last time and it was amazing to experience the many voices of our own congregation in our space in this way.

Dave and Ian chatted with the children about the things that Mary might have felt through her story from hearing Gabriel's message all the way to encounters with shepherds and prophets and presenting Jesus in the Temple. Ian offered a prayer for all the people who have similar experiences to Mary.

Dave's sermon '[Extension Table Sunday](#)' explored Luke's '*tantalising insights in to Jesus' early life*' including Mary's purification, Simeon's revelation and their encounter with Anna the prophetess. Dave asked '*what are we to make of all of this? Where is the good news?*' He commented that there are two major themes being explored '*some sense of awe at seeing the infant Jesus*' and '*that the Christ-event – the birth of Jesus - upsets the normal world order. Disrupts. It's inconvenient. It's a shot to the heart for Mary, it'll bring massive changes to the Jerusalem temple, it upends our understanding of God.*' So why Extension Table Sunday? Dave concluded sharing a story about the Bird family from Alice Springs arriving unexpectedly for Christmas Day. He commented that '*They'd driven all day and night for a couple of days to be with us on Christmas. They'd brought nothing with them. Their presence was the gift.*' He said that they needed a couple of more extension tables that Sunday - '*It's extension table Sunday, folks, and God has just pushed the tables out even more. Amen.*'



[Read the Order of Service](#)



3/1 [Christmas 2](#), Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:21-40

As we prepared to celebrate Epiphany Natalie invited us to join with the wise men who followed the star, and saw within a newborn baby, the promise of a new future.

Ian lit the five candles of the Christmas season for the gifts of the Wise Men - 1) gold for a King, 2) frankincense for the child who will show God to us, 3) myrrh for the king who will die as all people do, 4) the gifts that we all bring to God and 5) God's greatest gift to the world - the gift of the baby Jesus.

the gift of the baby Jesus.





Ian began his sermon '[Christmas and Creation](#)' commenting on the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter and the cosmic themes of John and Matthew's gospels. Ian took us on a journey from the beginning of the Universe through to now and asked 'And where was God through all this? And where was Jesus for that matter?' Noting our relative insignificance in the face of all this Ian said 'Today, with Matthew, Mark and John, we are not making scientific assertions, we are telling a story, or perhaps better, singing a song of God's life with and in and through us. ... We tell this story, sing this song, today for all who are carried by the awesome but violent rhythms of the universe, all who are lost in its immensity, dislocated from the love at its source – we sing a song of new creation.' He concluded 'Here today, we are bold to claim, that in the humility of the Star Child our humility, our insignificance, finds meaning and purpose. In him is our genesis, our new birth and new beginning. For Christmas and Creation are part of the same ongoing story – may we sing that story in our living with faith, hope and love.'



We joyfully celebrated Holy Communion for the first time together in the worship space since March last year.



[Read the Order of Service](#) or [watch again on YouTube](#)

> Act for Peace 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. We offered prayers during Prayers for the People, made donations and purchases from our online Christmas Bowl Catalogue. Thank you to Glenice Cook, Natalie Papworth, Leanne Salau, Bev Evans, Christine Hornby and Saide Cameron for providing produce and craft for the catalogue. Together we have donated in excess of \$6,000 online and through donations at worship and approximately \$1,500 through the catalogue.



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 season exploring how we are called to live God's future now.

Saide Cameron