

Opening verse on screen:

Luke 3:4 "Prepare the way of our God, make their paths straight."

Gathering, Greeting and Call to Worship**Natalie**

Good morning, please move into the seating area.

Let us stand as we listen for the bell, and welcome the word.

Let us gather together to wait in hope for what is to come:
To listen to the prophets who spoke of God's saving grace,
To hear the Spirit who speaks through all of creation,
And to meet with Christ who brings light to all who sit in darkness.

Let us sing together the ancient Advent hymn "O Come O Come Emmanuel"

Song of praise: O Come O Come Emmanuel TiS 265

- 1. O Come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*
 - 2. O Come, O come, thou Lord of might who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law in cloud and majesty and awe.*
 - 3. O Come, thou key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home;
make sure the way that leads on high and close the path to misery.*
 - 5. O Come, thou dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight.*
-

SONG: [O come, O come Emmanuel](#), anonymous, tr. John Mason Neale, from [Together in Song](#),
Harper Collins *Religious*, PUBLIC DOMAIN

Acknowledgement of Country

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.**

Welcome and Introduction**Natalie**

Good morning, my name is Natalie, and together with our minister Ian, and all of our community worshipping here in Brunswick, and online, I welcome you as we worship together.

Today is the Second Sunday of Advent, when we will hear the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and their son John the Baptist, three prophets who found their voices to speak about their hope in a saviour who would pave the way for God to come into the world.

After the service, please join us in the hall to share morning tea and conversation. Welcome. Let us now pray together.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession including Word of Grace

Natalie

Saving God, Womb of Life, and Creator of All,
God of Zechariah and of John the Baptist,
God of Mary and of Elizabeth,
God of yesterday and of today and of tomorrow,
Words can never capture your glory.

Holy Spirit, Breath of Creation, and Wind of Change,
Spirit who spoke through the prophets,
Spirit who gave birth to the church
Spirit of yesterday and of today and of tomorrow,
Move among us too, so that we may speak words of truth.

Jesus Christ, Child of God, Hope of the World,
The Holy One, foretold by the prophets,
The Holy One, Born in a manger,
The Holy One, of yesterday and of today and of tomorrow,
Come, with your words of wisdom, challenging the structures of power

Saving God, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ,
We confess together the times when we have failed to use our voices.
We have not spoken up when we could have made a difference.
We have failed to speak words of comfort to those who mourn,
or words of truth in times of injustice.

We have not stood up for the voiceless.

We have been ashamed or embarrassed to declare ourselves Christians,
Forgive us, Loving God.

Equip us with the words we need and the courage to speak,
so that we may follow you in the way of truth.

Sisters and Brothers, God listens and hears our prayers and promises a renewed world.
Every valley shall be lifted, every mountain made low.
Remember the Good news of Christ, our sin is forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

With the Children part 1: Advent Candle Lighting

Dave & Ian

We light this candle for peace.

God of peace may we offer your mercy on the way to peace

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

With the Children: Dramatised Bible Reading (Luke 1:5-25, 57-80) Dave

Narrator: Julie McKinnon

Angel Gabriel: Susannah Denholm

Zechariah and Elizabeth: Justin and Gina Denholm

Narrator:

When Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest by the name of Zechariah from the priestly group of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was from the family of Aaron who was the brother of Moses. Both of them were good people and pleased God by obeying the commands. But Elizabeth could not have any children, and both Zechariah and Elizabeth were old.

Elizabeth sits in a front pew, Zechariah stands behind the communion table

Narrator: One day Zechariah's group of priests were on duty, and he was chosen to go into the Lord's temple that day and to burn incense, while the people stood outside praying. All at once an angel from God appeared at the right side of the altar!

Angel: *(steps out from the Olive Way door, or from a pew near where Dave sits)*

Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayers. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you must name him John. His birth will make you very happy, and many people will be glad. Your son will be a great servant of God. The power of the Holy Spirit will be with him from the time he is born.

He will have the same power and spirit that Elijah had. John will get people ready for the Lord.

Zechariah: How will I know this is going to happen? My wife and I are both very old.

Angel: I am Gabriel, God's servant, and I was sent to tell you this good news. You have not believed what I have said. So you will not be able to say a thing until all this happens. But everything will take place when it is supposed to.

(Dave and the kids put a scarf around Zechariah's mouth. Zechariah remains standing behind the communion table)

Narrator: The crowd was waiting for Zechariah and kept wondering why he was staying so long in the temple. When he did come out, he couldn't speak, and they knew he had seen a vision. He motioned to them with his hands, but did not say a thing. (*Zechariah tries to use sign language*)

Elizabeth: When Zechariah's time of service in the temple was over, he came home. Soon after that, I was expecting a baby, and for five months I did not leave the house. When my son was born, my neighbors and relatives heard how kind the Lord had been to me, and they too were glad.

Eight days later we did for the child what the Law of Moses commands. People were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. But I said, "No! His name is John." Everyone argued with me, "No one in your family has ever been named John."

Narrator: So they motioned to Zechariah to find out what he wanted to name his son. (*Zechariah asks for a piece of paper, and writes: "His name is John."*)

Narrator: Everyone was amazed. Right away, Zechariah started speaking and praising God. (*Dave and the kids take Zechariah's mouth scarf off.*)

Zechariah: We will name him John.

Dave and Ian then ask the kids: ok, so what on earth does this story have to do with Jesus? add Zechariah and Elizabeth and John to the nativity scene,

Song: A voice is heard, NCYC 99.10

*Chorus: Come let us praise our God,
Come let us sing for joy,
With a heart of thanks we give honour
You are a mighty God,
You are the source of life
Creator God we give praise*

*1. From the deepest seas (a voice is heard)
From the highest hills (a voice is heard)
From the rich dark earth (a voice is heard)
All creation sings! God is heard! **Chorus:***

*2. Through the darkest night (a voice is heard)
Through the breaking dawn (a voice is heard)
Through the heart of life (a voice is heard)
All creation sings! God is heard! **Chorus:***

SONG: [A voice is heard](#), by Trisha Watts & Monica O'Brien © Willow Connection 1998, from [It all depends](#), NCYC '99 Songbook, Uniting Church in Australia, Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502

Children up to the kids corner for quiet activities.

Bible Reading: Luke 3:1-6

Julie

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' ”

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word:

Thanks be to God

Reflection: Finding Our Voice

Ian

My daughter's first ever sentence was uttered when she was remarkably young – probably only a couple of months old. That first sentence was: “Mum dum (verb to be understood)”. It was actually a question: “Mum dum?” – the answer of course being “absolutely not” in every sense of the word.

Now, you might say, I am applying meaning where in fact all I was hearing was baby babble, and you might be right, but that hasn't stopped me telling this story for the past 29½ years. And even if no meaning was intended in those two eloquent words, there is still something extraordinary at play here. Because language is not just about words, is it? – babies have this amazing innate ability to absorb and imitate, not just words, but patterns and dynamics of speech. Before she had any vocabulary, my daughter would speak baby babble in articulate phrases with recognisable intonation, as in “mum dum?” She was finding her voice before she had any words.

And that is our theme for Advent this year, “finding our voice” – finding the phrasing, the intonation, the vocabulary of faith and spirituality, the body language of living, like children emerging into the wonders of speech. This theme will be played out in our Christmas pageant this year, and today we discover why, today we meet some key gospel characters who will feature large in the Christmas story, characters who demonstrate for us what it means to find our voice as people of faith.

I admit to the irony of “dum” being one of my daughter's first words (just to push this fantasy a bit further). Because dumb is a word which means to be without speech, and it is also a slur which means foolish or stupid. And in this week that saw the International Day of People with Disability, in this week above all others, I think it is important to acknowledge the way our language regularly turns descriptions of physical or intellectual disability into slurs. Let's acknowledge that unhappy reality today, recommitting to God's work of justice in the world by getting our language right, by speaking in ways that do not diminish or marginalise or abuse any of God's children.

On the surface, the bible is not a great help with this. It regularly uses disability as a metaphor for lack of faith, as happens today with Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Zechariah has dared to question the Angel Gabriel's promise of a son by his elderly wife Elizabeth: “Are you sure about this, Gabe?” he says, “because we are pretty old and infertile.” Gabriel replies – and this is the old King James translation: *Behold Zechariah, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed.* Thou shalt be dumb. In the New Revised Standard Version, the translation we use here, Gabriel says, “you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

“Mute” – that's a more neutral term than “dumb”, isn't it? Yes, until it is spoken to us with that barely suppressed edge of lockdown exasperation that I'm sure most of us have heard: “You're on mute!” – and you've just said something brilliant and incisive, and then it just doesn't come out as well the second time. Being mute in the age of the pandemic is no longer a neutral state.

So, Zechariah is “dumb” in the old translation, and he is “on mute” in the new translation, but in the language that is being translated, the ancient Greek of the New Testament, he is simply “silent”. The Greek word Gabriel uses is σιωπάω, a verb meaning to be quiet, to remain silent, but it can also have a wider metaphoric meaning, to be calm, to be free from agitation. We see this in Mark 4 when Jesus is out in a boat with his disciples on a stormy sea – the wind is raging and the waves are crashing into the boat, until Jesus stands up and cries out, “σιώπα! silence!” (Mark 4:39). The NRSV translates it: “Peace.” And immediately the sea is completely still, it is silent and calm. σιώπα – the miracle of peace in the turmoil of life.

What happens to Zechariah is a different kind of miracle, a punitive miracle, but could it have some overlap with that miracle of peace on the stormy sea? The verb σιωπάω just means to be quiet, calm, soundless, with none of the pejorative overtones of dumb or mute. I don’t think it is pushing it to say that Zechariah enters a contemplative state of being here, a calm, silent, waiting time – waiting for the word of God to be heard. His silence need not be seen as a harsh punishment, but an opportunity for inner reflection and preparation for what is to come – a gift rather than a penalty.

What do you know of this? – the gift of silence, the miracle of peace? When and how do you find and enter that listening time, that prayer time – the silence in which we find our voice? I pray that Advent might be such a time for you this year.

And a quick aside, dear God. This is not a prayer for more lockdowns. Thank you.

When Zechariah does find his voice, out of the enforced prayerfulness of his silence, it happens like this. He is filled with the Holy Spirit and sings a prophetic song – a song which contains some of the most beautiful words in scripture: *“In the tender Compassion of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”* The Word of God speaks in and through Zechariah by the power of the Holy Spirit. He becomes a prophet – a prophet of peace.

But Zechariah is an old man, a priest, a figure of worldly authority and privilege – and the gospel teaches us to be suspicious of people like him. Sure, he’s been humbled by silence. But how well can we actually relate to him?

Perhaps you might relate more to Mary. The young girl, powerless in her world, who also finds her voice in this story. Like Zechariah she hears the Word of God, the Holy Spirit comes upon her, and she sings her world upside-down: the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the lowly are raised up. She becomes a prophet of justice, singing the Word of God, and then bringing that word to birth with her very life, with her body language.

Or perhaps you relate to Elizabeth, the old woman whose hopes have died, infertile in a world where female identity and worth are tied up in the bearing and raising of children. When Elizabeth, with God’s promised hope growing in her womb, meets Mary also pregnant with promise, we read, *Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry...* words that those raised Catholic among us know well... *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”* Elizabeth hears the Word of God, or feels it kicking her inside, receives the Holy Spirit, and finds her voice as a prophet of blessing.

Can you see the pattern? All these characters find their voice as prophets speaking the Word of God.

And this is especially true of John the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Back at the end of Luke chapter 1, after his conception and birth, he gets left like this: *The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.* That’s 30 years or so he was in the wilderness – quite a silence, 30 years of listening for God’s word. And then, 30 years later, in Luke chapter 3 we read, *the word of God came to John son of Zechariah [and Elizabeth] in the wilderness.* And he emerges into the world proclaiming the grace of God and preparing the way of the Lord. Like Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary before him, John finds his voice as a prophet of transformation, speaking the Word of God.

What about us? How do you feel about the idea that finding your voice, might mean finding God's voice in you? Could your voice be God's voice? Could we be prophets, speaking the Word of God, preparing the way of God, with our body language? Or are our lives too ordinary for angels and divine promises and miraculously peaceful silences into which the Word of God comes to give new direction and new hope?

Let's listen now and see what we can hear. On this busy street, with the buzz of life in us and around us, let's take a moment of silence. A moment to enter the peace of God, the calm in the storm. Close eyes...

Let's enter this moment like infants learning to speak – infants tuning into the voices around us, the voices of our tradition, the voices of the saints who have gone before us and who sit beside us. Let's listen like infants absorbing and imitating the peace of Zechariah, the blessing of Elizabeth, the world transforming justice of Mary, the forgiving grace of John. And above all, let's listen, absorb and imitate the love of the one to whom all these prophets point, the one who silences the storm with a word, “σιῶπα, peace, be still”.

What do you hear in the silent prayerfulness of your heart?

Olive Way Story

Natalie

As we respond to the word of God spoken and enacted in and through us here today, I'm going to read you a story from this booklet *With Open Arms – Reflections on neighbourliness and urban spirituality through the ministry of the Love Way* – something we are doing each week during Advent this year. This story entitled “The Magic of the Sydney Road Opera Company” (p. 17) speaks of ways our church is helping people find their voices.

One of the ways I have described the Sydney Road Opera Company (SROC) for people over years is 'grassroots music theatre at its most grassroots'. It began a few years back when Damian Coleridge was visiting St Ambrose across the road, saw the sign for Olive Way, dropped in and fortuitously started a conversation with some guests that eventually led to the birth of the Sydney Road Opera Company (I may have skipped a few intervening steps here but you get the idea). Since that time SROC has put on a dozen or so performances, each birthed from the unique collection of stories and life experiences that the participants bring with them.

Over the years of working in Olive Way I have been able to observe, not just the performances, but also what the performances and the writing process has done for the participants. Whether the participants are performing in a production, writing their story, or telling their story, everyone who comes can find a way to contribute. The performances present an opportunity to share and to celebrate the culmination of the story writing and story telling process. But what goes into each performance is hours of discussion, carefully and creatively facilitated by Damian, shaped into a sometimes chaotic, sometimes exuberant, sometimes tragic-comic production. There is no polish in an SROC performance, there doesn't need to be, it's not what it's about.

Acting ability is not as important as the willingness to give it a go. There's no need to memorise pages of lines, they read off scripts. It is designed to be accessible, and as a result, it has been remarkable and surprising who has joined their ranks over the years.

In a way, SROC is not just musical theatre, it is also therapy; inasmuch as participants have a chance to share their stories and act it out (or have another participant act it out). This for me is the magic of SROC. In fact, if you've ever been along to an SROC performance you've probably come away thinking, 'What was going on there?' Of course, as I have come to appreciate, the performance is only one layer, albeit the final layer, of many that make up SROC. The other layers are built up in the West End of the hall on Thursday mornings. It is through this process that people become known to one another on a much deeper level where they can share, and also laugh at their struggles, and find new meaning.

Offering Song: Prepare the way with quietness

*Prepare the way with quietness,
a stillness in the storm,
that will not speak the wounding words
that cheapen or deform.*

*Prepare the way with hopeful words
some mock but others crave,
that makes the empire flinch in fear
and turn the fearful brave.*

*Prepare the way through holding back
while others grasp or strain
for unjust wealth and untamed power
that add to human pain.*

Text written by Rev. David Bjorlin, 1984 © 2020 GIA Publications, Inc.
<https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/protest-and-praise-print-g10101>

Prayers of the People

Peter

Gentle voice, whispering across our land and down our laneways;
Loving voice, making yourself known within our hearts
and through the grace of others;
Roaring voice, thundering through our days and sometimes complacent ways
in defence of the defenceless.
Voice of the ages, voice of promise, voice of the prophets, of John, of brother Jesus -
Hear *our* voice this day we pray

We are the silent ones,
struck mute with doubt and numbed by surprise;
too deaf to hear, too blind to see the miracles that surround us.
Forgive us our frail humanity, O God
And touch our lips to proclaim your goodness, however and wherever it falls.

In the world, where conflict prevails too often and self-interest rules,
may we be your voice, speaking out for a neglected planet, speaking up for the forgotten,
offering hearts and hands to make things right.
And joining the dance when commitments are made, treaties signed, breakthroughs secured.

We are the wizened ones,
past it all, sceptical and tired.
Refresh our spirits, Holy One, with open hearts and new visions of hope.

In our cities and communities, cracking beneath the weight of need and struggle,
may we walk with joy, arms overflowing with gifts of love and acts of grace,
so that others may see in our eyes the good news that first lifted us up, each one.

We are the measured ones,
rational and knowing, confident of where we step and how we present,
immersed in the pilgrim journey.
Grant us humility and pause, humble in our own knowledge, secure in your grip.
Enable us to be your church, the leaven in the lump,
'Rise up, rise up' flowing from our lips as we seek to make you known, O God.

Living One,
Our peace in the storm, our wink of knowing,
the source of love in whom and through whom love has its being,
Knowing that you hear these prayers and walk with us, ever close,
We give you thanks. Amen

Holy Communion

Servers

Ian/Janet, Natalie, Dave, Helen, Claire, Max

All are welcome to this table
where we meet Christ
and share the feast of
a new beginning for creation.
Come just as you are,
there is a place for everyone here.
Participate as much as you are comfortable,
for this meal does not depend
on our understanding or familiarity,
but on the compassionate grace of the Creator.

Communion Song

Prepare the way with quietness (tune ERIN TiS507) – David Bjorlin (vs 4-5)

*Prepare the way with fervent love
that tears down walls of hate
and reconstructs a kinder world
that justice can create.*

*Prepare the way until we reach
the dawn of that new day
when all our paths converge in Christ
and we have found our way.*

Thanksgiving

We are the body of Christ: **His Spirit is with us.**

Lift up your hearts: **We lift our hearts to God.**

Let us give thanks to God who is Wisdom and Love:

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Father of goodness, Mother of kindness,
for creation in its wonder and mystery

We thank you

for Jesus your beloved Son,
our way through the wilderness,

We thank you

for your Holy Spirit preparing the way in us,

We thank you

And with the whole realm of nature around us,
with earth, sea and sky,

we sing to you!

With all the saints before us and beside us,
with brothers and sisters,
east and west, north and south,
we sing to you!

And with our loved ones,
separate from us now,
who yet, in this mystery are close to us,
we sing the hymn of unending praise:

Holy, holy, holy (TIS764)

*Holy (Holy), holy, (holy)
holy Lord of power and might.
Heaven (Heaven), earth (earth)
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
All glory to your name.
(All glory to your name.)
All glory to your name.
(All glory to your name.)*

*Blessed (Blessed), blessed (blessed)
is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Blessed (Blessed), blessed (blessed)
is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.
(Hosanna in the highest.)
Hosanna in the highest.
(Hosanna in the highest.)*

Blessed is our brother Jesus,
who on the night of his betrayal took bread,
gave thanks, broke it and said:
***This is my body given for you.
Whenever you eat it, remember me.***

In the same way also, he took the cup.
Again he gave thanks,
shared it with his disciples and said:
***This is the cup of a new covenant in my blood.
whenever you drink it, remember me.***

Come now, Holy Spirit of the living God,
love us into the unity of peace
through this bread and wine. For:
***Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again!***

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ
all glory be to you,
Source of all Being,
Eternal Wisdom and Holy Spirit,
one God and Mother of all creation.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.***

Breaking of the bread

Christ is the bread of resurrection:
new life for all.

Christ is the cup of life:
who revives the faint-hearted.

We who are many are one body,
for we all share in the one bread.

Let us receive what we are.
Let us become what we receive:
The body of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Distribution

Communion served in one circle

The Peace

The peace of Christ be with you all:
And also with you

Share the peace, return to your seats

Notices

Natalie

Sending Song: We are Marching, ATO 499

Natalie

-
- 1. Si-ya-hamb' e-ku-kha-nyen'kwen-khos'*
 - 2. We are marching in the light of God*
 - 3. We are speaking out the truth of God*
-

SONG: [We are marching in the light of God](#), South African, [All together okay](#), Openbook Publishers,
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Blessing and Sending

Ian

The word of God came to John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, in the wilderness.
The word of God has come to us, here in this place.
Now go to lift up your voice, preparing the way for peace.

Let us bless one another with the words of the Grace:

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, evermore. Amen*

Thank yous

Liturgist:
Natalie Sims

Bible readers:
Julie McKinnon

Children's time:
Ian Ferguson
Dave Hall
(Pastor: Children, Youth
and Young Adults)

Reflection:
Ian Ferguson
(Minister of the Word)

Prayers of the People:
Peter McKinnon

Musicians:
Matthew Lees
(co-ordinator)
Helen Burnham
Bronte Potter
Robert Sargent
Kate Scull
Bridie Turner
Shawn Whelan

Songs: (Prelude &
Postlude)
Prepare Ye the Way of the
Lord
Musicians: James Balsillie,
Joel Hallinan, Charlotte
Pitt, Alistair Hunter,
Courtney Rohde

Images:
Ian Ferguson

Editing / Production:
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron
Ben Hon
Lauren Reader
Mal Rowe

Closing verse on screen:

Luke 3:4 "Prepare the way of Our God, make their paths straight."