

THE OLIVE BRANCH

**Advent & Christmas 2021 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 and services as well as lots of photos.

> Advent

Across the four Sundays we paid attention to the theme of finding our voice. We did this by responding to readings from the lectionary, listening to Olive Way stories from 'With Open Arms' and engaging directly with artworks from Emergence or appreciating them as title slides. Along the way we lit Advent candles, sang 'Flame of Love' each week, created a nativity scene, launched and dedicated 'With Open Arms', celebrated Holy Communion and two baptisms and appreciated insights offered by Beth Shelton into Mary & Elizabeth's experiences.

> Advent Litany

Each Sunday we lit candles for the Advent gifts of hope, peace, joy and love singing Julie Perrin's song Flame of Love



Advent 1: We light this candle for hope.
God of hope give us your strength for the days to come.



Advent 2: We light this candle for peace.
God of peace may we offer your mercy on the way to peace



Advent 3: We light this candle for joy.
God of joy let us rejoice as we reach out to each other with gentleness.



Advent 4: We light this candle for love.
God of love guide us as we seek to reshape the world with love.

> 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 talks about Flame of Love, 2016.

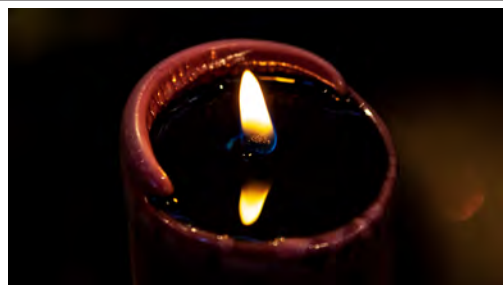
In this song we sing our gladness to God as we ask for the mystery of God's presence to be with us. The first verse is calling to the Holy One and is written from the point of view of a child – imagining the Holy Spirit as a flame that warms our hearts and makes a home there like a cradle for the Christ 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

> With the Children

Dave and the children created a nativity scene adding new characters from the story each week.



Advent 1: The star was raised and set in the sky above the nativity scene to come.



Advent 2: Zechariah & Elizabeth were added sharing their voices



Advent 3: Angels and animals found their way



Advent 4: Mary, Joseph, shepherds all made an appearance as well as more angels

> With Open Arms

[With Open Arms](#) is a series of stories that give a small glimpse into life at Olive Way. Most of these were originally included in the Olive Branch monthly newsletter and have been expanded and revised here. Olive Way is a ministry outreach of Brunswick Uniting Church that began in 2007 offering a welcoming environment with simple snacks along with tea and coffee, since expanding to include a weekly meal and toasted sandwiches. It exists to be a community sustained by Christian hospitality. The following reflections have arisen out of my own and some of our volunteers' experiences of doing ministry in Olive Way and our experiences of doing hospitality as an expression of our Christian faith.



Peter Blair, Olive Way Pastor
(from the Preface)

During worship on **28th November** Ian dedicated this little book of stories, [With Open Arms](#), as an offering to God. He said '*In it you will meet a host of colourful characters, and find reflections on the ministry of hospitality that we offer as a church through the Olive Way.*



In dedicating this booklet we honour the people whose stories are told in it. We honour the vision of the Olive Way and all the volunteers and workers who have made it a place where these stories can be told, where these lives can be celebrated and Christ's community of hope grown.

I commend it to you as a good read and an offering of thanksgiving for the Olive Way.'

We prayed

We long for the time
when the meek shall inherit the earth
and all who hunger and thirst after justice
shall be satisfied,
and we believe that, despite the persistence of evil,
now is always the time
when more good can be done
and we can make a difference.

**May it be so, through the offering of these gifts
and the offering of our lives. Amen.**

[Source: Prayer for Justice and Peace, Iona]



With Open Arms



Reflections on neighbourliness
and urban spirituality
through the ministry of the Olive Way
by Peter Blair, Olive Way Pastor



Peter thanked Bev Evans for the front cover artwork 'Tranquility' and Saide Cameron for editing and producing the book gifting them with flowers and gift cards from Readings.

Published copies are available in the Gathering Space at church. Call Saide, 0407 096 743, if you would like a copy posted to you.

> Advent Baptisms

During worship on **Sunday 12th December**, Advent 3, we celebrated the baptisms of Benjamin Smith, son of Rebecca and Ross and Samantha Siemensma, daughter of Jessica and Nick. Welcoming us to worship Amelia Ware said *'Today our worship will be full of joy as we celebrate the baptisms of Benjamin and Samantha, and share the happiness of their families. We will hear more about John the Baptist and try to understand what baptism meant and looked like to him, and how this might challenge us to change the way we move through the world.'*

Dave Hall, Children, Youth & Young Adult Pastor introduced Benjamin and Samantha

It is with great joy that I offer a few words of introduction for the two children about to be baptised – to the congregation gathered here, and those watching online.

Benjamin Andrew Smith was born on January 14, 2020 to Rebecca and Ross. In a bit over a month he will celebrate his second birthday. Benjamin was the clear name both Bec and Ross agreed on – a good choice as it's also my middle name. Benjamin is a bit of a whiz with the shape puzzles we have in the kids corner.

Andrew is Bec's dad's name, and Bec's grandfather was Frank Measday, a Uniting Church minister in South Australia.

And I believe that all four of Ross's grandparents are here in attendance. Welcome.

Samantha Jean Louise Siemensma was born on October 13, 2020 to Jessica Smead and Nick Siemensma. Jess tells the story that when she was pregnant she had a dream that her baby was a girl, and the name Samantha was in the dream. Sounds pretty consistent with our Biblical tradition, here! Both Jess and Nick liked the name Samantha, so here she is. Harriet was the back-up name (hello Harriet). Jean is Jessica's middle name and Louise is a middle name of the family.

Samantha prefers vacuum cleaner nozzles as toys, and also loves water.

I believe Samantha has six grandparents here today, (equalling the BUC record) and a good contingent from the family. Welcome everyone.



Welcome & Introduction



Questions



Blessing the water & oil



Baptising Samantha



Making promises



Baptising Benjamin



Remembrance of Baptism

[Watch here](#)

> Christmas Baptisms



During worship on **Sunday 2nd January**, Christmas 2 we celebrated the baptisms of Natalie and Arian Hakimi, children of Nili & Hamid and Yosef Arnold, son of Luke & Leli. Welcoming us to worship Ian Ferguson said 'We're beginning our year in worship with our two most sacred ceremonies. We're going to baptize three children this morning and we're going to gather around the table of Holy Communion, a good way to begin the new year.'



Dave Hall, Children, Youth & Young Adult Pastor, introduced Natalie and Arian.

Natalie Hakimi was born on 22 January, 2020 to Nili and Hamid. We are

delighted that a number of Nili's family are here this morning, and through the communion of saints we remember Hamid's parents.

Natalie loves playing with other children. Very friendly, Her mum Nili attests that she's very good with communication, especially trying to talk on the phone, a bit cheeky, a bit naughty, loves shopping. Nili and Hamid pray for her ongoing health and happiness.

Then 9 months ago, they welcomed Arian Hakimi in to the world – on 3 April 2021. Nili and Hamid are very glad they can now both be baptised – after COVID. Arian is a quiet boy, and in Nili's words he likes to eat everything, is very funny, likes to play with water (you're in luck today Arian), and is very handsome – yes, we can agree there, Nili.

Gwen Arnold, Yosef's grandmother introduced Yosef - Yosef Nelson Arnold is the youngest son of Luke Arnold and Leli Setiono. He has an older Brother Thiamhien (Theo) who turned 10 yesterday (Jan 1st).



The name "Yosef" is the original name of the Biblical figure who saved Egypt from famine and forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery. The figure of Yosef is central to all the Abrahamic faiths – which also know him as "Yusuf" and "Joseph".

Yosef is 8. He was born here in Melbourne and Canberra is his home, but he has lived overseas in Indonesia and Cambodia for 5 of his 8 years and is about to head to another country to live for 3 years

Yosef loves reading and is currently reading Harry Potter book 4. As a young child one of his favourite books was "Stuck". He also loves cricket and has managed to get 10 balls "stuck" on the roof of his grandparents' home in the last 10 days!!!

Just as his brother Thiamhien was named after a famous Indonesian human rights activist, Yosef too bears the middle name "Nelson" named after Nelson Mandela who was ill at the time of Yosef's birth and died 2 weeks later. It's fitting that Yosef is now being baptised shortly after the passing of Mandela's spiritual guide, Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

[Watch here](#)



Cradled in the Arms of Love



Questions



Blessing the water & oil



Baptising Yosef



Baptising Natalie



Making promises



Baptising Arian



A celebratory cake

Promises

After the families had made their promises the congregation also made our familiar promise

Friends in Christ,
will you promise to maintain
the life of worship and teaching,
witness and service,
that Samantha and Benjamin (12/12), Natalie and Arian, and Yosef, (2/1)
and all the children among you
may grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
and the knowledge and love of God.

**With God's help,
we will live out our baptism
as a loving community in Christ:
nurturing one another in faith,
upholding one another in prayer,
and encouraging one another in service
until Christ comes.**

Baptism candles

At the conclusion of baptism ceremonies we give the children a candle in a wood-turned candle holder. Over the years these have been made by members of Saide's family - her father Eric Payne, uncle Alan Lubke, son David Cameron and cousin Jenny Hayes.

The candles are presented with these words:

*You belong to Christ the light of the world.
May you always walk as children of the light.*

We encourage families to keep these candles to light on special occasions.



Samantha



Benjamin



Yosef



Natalie and Arian

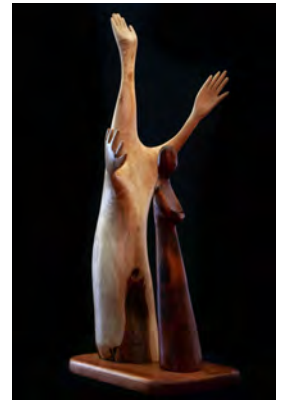


> Advent Worship



28/11, [Advent 1](#), [Matthew 11:2-6](#); [Luke 21:25-36](#) Kirsty welcomed us to the first Sunday of Advent saying *'Hear we are already, looking forward with hope'*.

The [Prayers of Adoration & Confession](#) took their inspiration from Catherine Leslie's work **'Cocoon'** and Colin Hunter's sculpture **'Hands that Help'**



Bible Readings
Matthew 11:2-6
Luke 21:25-36

We welcomed Peter Blair, Olive Way Pastor, as our preacher. Peter began his reflection **'[With Open Arms](#)'** noting that for those hearing the apocalyptic text from Matthew for the first time it *'would have been a vision of hope'*. Peter explored the signs of God's kingdom listed by Jesus commenting that *Jesus list these as signs of God's kingdom amongst us*. He said that firstly Jesus gives us *'a vision of an unjust and unbalanced world set right'* and invites us to *'live in state of readiness for the reign of God, to live as though God's reign was imminent'*. Peter asked *'what are the signs that we are to look for?'* and went on to explore the cycles of human destruction and offered a paraphrase of Jesus' teaching, *"Look, there's going to be a lot of stuff going down soon, some bad stuff, but don't go thinking that's me coming back. You'll know when it's me, you'll know the sign."* As we prepared to dedicate the book **'[With Open Arms](#)'** (see page 3) Peter spoke of the journeys in the cycle of life with people from the Olive Way and shared Carol's story with us. He concluded *'Olive Way is not only for those who are just like us, or the easy to like, easy to get to know, easy to love. It is a space that allows for the 'other', those who are not just like us, who's social skills may be a bit off, or who struggle to fit in to places easily. This is the place that Jesus calls his church to inhabit (John 1:11-13).'*



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



5/12, [Advent 2](#), [Luke 1:5-25, 57-80](#) Natalie welcomed us to the second Sunday of Advent. Julie McKinnon, Susannah, Justin and Gina Denholm brought us 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.



Ian's reflection **'[Finding our voice](#)'** offered an invitation to *'recommit 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'* and also an exploration of Zechariah's experience of being dumb/muted/silent. Ian wondered what we knew of the *'gift of silence, the miracle of peace'*.



He reminded us that when Zechariah does find his voice he becomes a prophet of peace. He wondered how well we could relate to Zechariah or if Mary or Elizabeth's experiences of finding their voices were more relatable affirming that they together with John all *'find their voice as prophets speaking the Word of God'*. Concluding Ian asked *'What about us? How do you feel about the idea that finding your voice, might mean finding God's voice in you? ... 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, "σῴματα, peace, be still".

We celebrated Holy Communion.



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.

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





12/12, [Advent 3](#), Luke 3:7-18 Amelia Ware welcomed us to worship. We celebrated the baptisms of Benjamin and Samantha (see page 4). We heard more about John the Baptist to try and understand what baptism meant and looked like to him, and how this might challenge us to change the way we move through the world.



In his reflection '[The Bible as an Incendiary Device](#)' Ian explored John the Baptist's story alongside and quoting from The Testaments and The Handmaids Tale by Margaret Atwood. He explained that in Gilead the Bible is viewed as an incendiary device with only selected parts read. He highlighted all the ways in which we John's teachings apply to us in our time. *'That's what JB reckons baptism requires: a change in the power dynamics of his world as they are shaped by wealth and privilege and gendered*



power. And now suddenly John the Baptist is sounding like a woke lefty progressive Social Justice Warrior as well as a ranting fire and brimstone preacher.' Ian affirmed that Margaret Atwood knows how dangerous the bible can be. He reminded us that this story about John the Baptist is just part of the introduction to the story of someone else. *JB is here to prepare the way for Jesus. And Jesus' teaching will be even more incendiary.* He concluded *'We may not like John's style, I certainly don't. But through all the discomforts, contradictions and challenges of his story, can we hear the call that John makes upon the people of his day, a call to a new way of being, a baptismal way of being, a world transforming way of being? And can we hear it as a call to us? What do you hear today?'*

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



19/12, [Advent 4](#), Luke 1: 39-45, 56, Luke 1:46-55 Helen Burnham welcomed us to worship. We heard from Luke 1: 39-45, finding Elizabeth, well past the age of child bearing, and Mary, a teenager. Both with the miracle of particles joining together to form babies who will turn the world upside down. The second reading also from Luke 1: 46-55, Mary's wonderful song to God, known as the "Magnificat."

In offering the Bible readings Lucy Hardman and Maxine Loynd pondered what Elizabeth and Mary have talked about.



For the reflection '[Women's Business](#)' Ian introduced Beth Shelton (sharing her considerable credentials) to talk to us about the story of the Visitation Luke 1:39-45 – Elizabeth and Mary's 3 month long meeting asking four big questions. Beth talked about why the stories of the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Magnificat have been important for her commenting that she has always been drawn to images of the angel coming to Mary and how that the moment is portrayed - the divine breaking into the everyday, the ordinariness. She affirmed that this experience can happen to everyone.

Referring to the moment when Elizabeth's child leaps for joy in her womb Beth shared stories from her research about how the women she spoke to experienced this moment, where the sense of being yourself and someone else becomes real. She affirmed that it is joyful but that women are often scared because so much is uncertain, there are wonderings if the child is okay especially towards the end - there is a lot of listening to their bodies.

Beth talked about the time Mary and Elizabeth spent together for three months feeling that they would have spent time creating meaning together, a co-creating of identity and meaning, knitting their lives together. She said that women tell birth stories to trusted others, changing the meaning, the story, themselves, their identity. Beth felt they had done something really deep together.

Beth said that she responds at a visceral level to the Yes in Mary's response, feeling it as a powerful call to values based action in the world. She believes that Mary's 'Yes' is not passive but an acceptance of what needs to be done and that in relation to a child this is something that all parents do no matter what happens in the life of the child. She also felt there is also a deeper Yes, our feelings as we go through things, allowing them to be, holding them and being aware of what we are feeling and being compassionate with ourselves. Beth affirmed that this story gives her some clues about what it means to be human.

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

> Christmas Worship

Blue Christmas



16/12, [Blue Christmas](#), Luke 2:1-14, Ian welcomed us to worship, During our service we focussed our reflections on 4 artworks from the Emergence exhibition. Each of these works spoke to an aspect of our spiritual journey through this season, especially in the light of our struggles with the pandemic.



Horizon - Michael Rigby



We lit the Advent candle for hope.

Honouring Reality - Horizon, Luke 2:1-7

A time to reflect on the reality of our year, how this images connects with our journey to Christmas this year.



Affinity - Michael Rigby



We lit the Advent candle for peace.

Lament - Practicing Honesty, Luke 2:8-11

A time to lament all that we have lost, to ask how we are feeling, if our world, our reality has been turned upside down



Alongside - Michael Rigby



We lit the Advent candle for joy.

Embracing Paradox, Luke 2:12-14

A time to wonder what we see & feel emotionally and in our bodies, to ask who are our companions, who is alongside us.

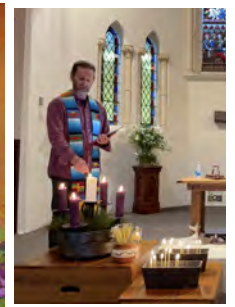
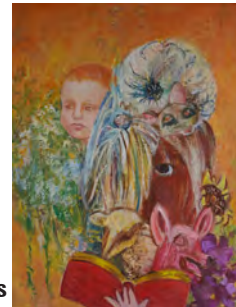


We came forward to light tapers for the people and situations in our hearts as we prepared to celebrate Holy Communion. We lit the Advent candle for love.



- Christina Berkman

The birth of Jesus



Borrowing Hope

We lit the Christ Candle.

A time to ask what hope we can borrow from the story of this child's birth, what we can take away to carry us through the season.

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

Christmas Eve Pageant



Dave offering welcome



24/12, Christmas Eve Pageant - Finding Your Voice. Dave welcomed us to worship. He invited us to listen to some familiar voices from the story of Jesus birth, and some not-so-familiar voices – voices like Elizabeth’s and Zechariah’s, commenting that they were very important voices when Luke sat down to write his story of Jesus birth.

Dave prayed that we may listen for Jesus’ voice throughout our lives, and in doing so, find our own true voice.

[Read the script](#) , [Look at the Worship book](#) or [Watch again on YouTube](#)



Angel Gabriel and Zechariah



Mary



Angel Gabriel and Mary



Elizabeth and Zechariah



Joseph



Angel Gabriel and Joseph



Joseph and Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah



Shepherds, Angel Gabriel and Trainee Angels



Trainee Angels



Wise Ones, Trainee Angel 4



The cast



The cast and friends



Musicians

Thank you

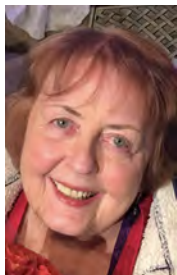
Offered at the conclusion of the pageant

Amen! Thank you everyone for coming tonight, and for watching from wherever you are in the world.

While there's no official supper tonight, you are very welcome to join us out in the big hall for some TimTams and cordial to hang out with the cast and all those involved in the pageant.

Before I offer the final blessing, there are a couple of quick acknowledgements to be made.

Firstly, I'd like to thank the cast...!



A short while ago the choir sang a beautiful piece, entitled '[Mary & Elizabeth's Song](#)'. We dedicate that in honour of the song's composer Dee Gorman who died in October of this year. We are grateful to Dee's husband Pastor Ken Gorman, Joan Saxbury the original arranger, Ryan Marvel who arranged the version used tonight and Tinmath Presbyterian Church in Colorado. Mary & Elizabeth's Song was first performed at Tinmath Presbyterian Church on Christmas Eve 2010.

Cast
(in order of appearance):

Zechariah: Hoth Beny

Angel G: Greta Drimmel

Elizabeth:

Susannah Denholm

Mary: Clara Hall

Voice of Jesus:

Hudson Coath

Voice of John:

Charlotte Lee

Joseph: Rowan Drimmel

Shepherd Emma:

Harriet Loynd

Shepherd Anthony:

Ruby Sanders

Shepherd Jeff:

Amelie Brown

Shepherd Murray:

Tameka Brown

Trainee Angel #2:

Lillian Sanders

Trainee Angel #3:

Imogen Lees

Trainee Angel #4:

Clementine Loynd

Wise One #1:

Anya Kvensakul

Wise One #2:

Matilda Brown

Wise One #3:

Amelie Brown

Acknowledgement of Country:

Eleanor Lees

Bible readers:

Patrick Hall

Owen Parris

Sam Coath

Meg McClintock

Samuel Hall

Writer and Director:

Caitlin Mullen-Beagley

Assistant Director:

Tess Alston

Production team:

Dave Hall

Saide Cameron

Ian Ferguson

AV Team:

Ray Cameron

Mal Rowe

Shawn Whelan

Jamie Thom

Music Coordinator:

Elaine Potter

Lots of people are about to be thanked on the screen, but I'd like to give a small gift to four people in particular:

Elaine Potter for coordinating so much of the music once again – thank you Elaine.

Saide Cameron for doing a lot of the behind-the-scenes logistical work – thank you Saide

Tess Alston for helping as Assistant Director of the Pageant for the first time. Thank you Tess.

And your biggest applause, please for the extraordinary Caitlin Mullen Beagley – writer and director of the pageant, and all-round amazing person – thank you Caitlin.



Dave offering thanks

Dave Hall

Musicians - Live:

Natalie Sims

(Coordinator)

Michael Cameron

Glenice Cook

Mikul Denison

Fergus Moorhouse

Shawn Whelan

Stage hand:

Patrick Hall

Photographer:

Ian Ferguson

Catering:

Matthew Cameron

Saide Cameron

Maggie Haines

Lydia Jacka

Alistair Hunter

- [A Little Room for Icecream](#)

Front of house:

Kirsty Bennett

Julie McKinnon

Linda Wannan

Virtual Choir (pre-recorded):

1. 1Goin' to Bethlehem, by

Jay Althouse, sold to

Elaine Potter by J. W.

Pepper & Son Inc.,

mixed by Julia Potter

2. Mary & Elizabeth's Song, by Dee Gorman, arranged by Ryan Marvel.

Used with permission, mixed by Shawn Whelan

3. Amen Go Tell It, arranged by Mary McDonald, Traditional Spirituals, sold to Elaine Potter by J. W. Pepper & Son Inc., mixed by Shawn Whelan

Vocalists: Saide Cameron

(1,2,3), Ian Ferguson, (1,2,3)

Jessica Kvensakul (1,2,3),

Catherine Leslie (1,2,3), Jason

Minator (3), Elaine Potter

(1,2,3), Kate Scull (1), Natalie

Sims (1,2,3), Geoff Thompson

(1), Amelia Ware (2,3), Shawn

Whelan (1,2,3)

Christmas Eve - Carols & Candlelights



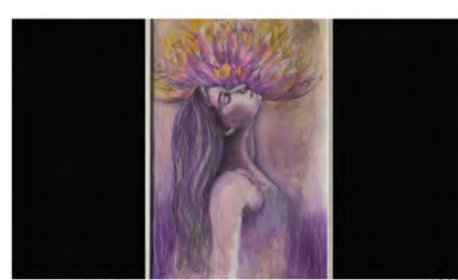
24/12, Christmas Eve, Luke 1:26- Saide welcomed us to worship on Christmas Eve. We gathered to sing, pray and light candles. During worship we looked at a series of paintings *Between Shadow and Light* by Soo Lai Yin (Ann). This series was part of our Emergence exhibition and offered us an invitation to enter into Mary's experience of Christmas. Postcards of the images were provided for reflection



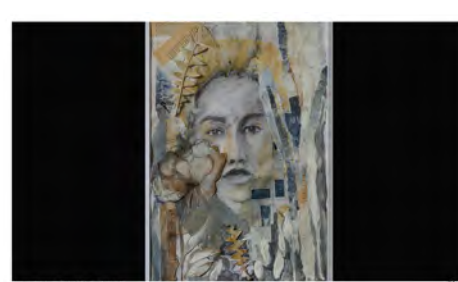
Annunciation, Luke 1:26-33, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary offering her greetings. But she was much perplexed. At the end of another challenging year, shaped by lockdowns, separation and uncertainty how have you heard God speaking to you? What has perplexed you, and where have you found hope?



Response, Luke 1:38, Mary responded to the angel 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; ...'. I wonder how she was feeling. Was she agitated, fearful, filled with wonder, amazed, at peace? How are you feeling this evening? Are you at peace, longing for peace in your life, in the world around us?



Rejoice, Luke 1:46-48a, 52-53, Mary rejoices in God her Saviour, proclaiming that all generations will call her blessed. Look deep within your soul. How does your living magnify God? What causes your spirit to rejoice in God? What and who has brought you joy through the experience of isolation, lockdown and loss? What troubles you personally and in the world we live in? Do you, like Mary, know yourself to be blessed? What are the changes you want to live in the year ahead? What will bring you joy?



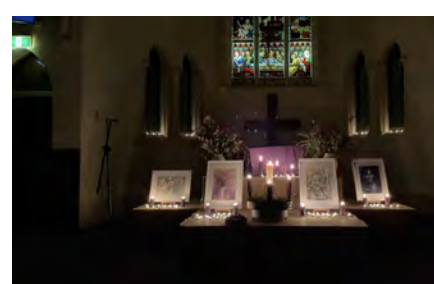
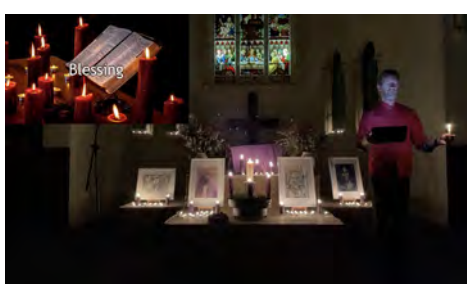
Birth, Luke 2:1-7, Mary delivered her child wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. I wonder how difficult all this was for Mary. Travelling heavily pregnant, no place but a manger for her precious baby. I wonder what she was thinking about - all the difficulties and challenges? Or was all her focus on her baby, on Jesus? Was her heart troubled? Was she overwhelmed with love? How is your heart tonight? What has love cost you this year? What gifts of love have you given and received? What can you celebrate?



Do not be afraid, Luke 2:8-19, The angel brings a message - good news of great joy for all the people. The shepherds, going about their daily business, are terrified. Mary and Joseph receive an expected visit from the shepherds. Mary treasures their words and ponders them in her heart. So much happening. And yet Mary takes time out to ponder the shepherds' words in her heart.

It's been a big year, two years in fact. So much has happened. The way we live and engage with the world, our community, each other, our family, friends, colleagues has changed so much. We've experienced too much and not enough at the same time, living in a constant state of paradox. God speaks into this space bringing good news of great joy for all the people. God says to us 'Do not be afraid ... 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.'

So then let us go with the shepherd to the manger and see what they saw - a baby born to a young mother, to Mary supported by Joseph. Treasure this moment. Treasure the hope, peace, joy and love you have remembered, discovered this year, this evening. Ponder these things in your heart.



Ian invited us to come forward with our carol candle, to light it from the Christ Candle, collect a tea light, light it and place it alongside the painting we had been most drawn to this evening. We concluded the service praying and singing by candlelight.



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

Christmas Day



Kirsty welcomed us to worship on [Christmas Day](#). She reminded us that during Advent we had listened to the voices of Creation, to Elizabeth and Mary, to John the Baptist and Zechariah, and we sought to find our voices. On Christmas Day we heard from the angels and the shepherds. With Mary we pondered and treasured their words.



Dave and Ian lit the Advent and Christ Candles with the children and then gathered around the nativity scene to wonder about a 1st century Israeli home and then add more to our nativity scene. They remembered that Jesus was born on the margins of society but surrounded by a loving community.



Isaiah 9:2-7, Luke 2:1-20

In his reflection '[An Amazing Christmas](#)' Ian shared a few things that have amazed him lately. Thing number 1 - the marvels of construction as he has watched a high density, multi-storey apartment building go up. Ian reminded us that the characters in the Christmas story are amazed by the birth of a child, how amazing it is for every child '*amazing in ordinariness with a future to build. And that is where God, the spirit of creative, healing love, meets us today*'.

Thing number 2 - the flowering of a plant in his garden, symbolic of the amazing universe that we live in. Ian wondered about the child born amazing everyone and drew our attention to Mary who treasures all the words spoken and ponders them in her heart.

Thing number 3 - 90% of all adults are vaccinated. Ian reminded us that the amazement of this is not enough to '*get us through the complexities of life under a pandemic ... but it is a start*'. Again he commented on Mary treasuring and pondering.

Concluding Ian shared that Mary is the only character in Luke's Gospel who is '*there both at the very beginning before Jesus is born, and at the very end after he has died.*' He invited us to think of all the amazing things '*Mary will witness and ponder on her way from Christmas to Pentecost.*' And finally he asked '*What amazes you? What do you treasure? What are you led to ponder? And from your pondering, from our pondering together, what amazing building of life might be constructed? What amazing bloom of love might flower? What amazing community of hope might be nurtured?*

Merry Christmas. Have an amazing day.'



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



2/1, [Christmas 2](#), [John 1:1-18](#) Ian welcomed us to worship for the first Sunday of the new year. Ian reminded us that Christmas continues into the new year as we reflect upon and hear stories about the incarnation, the birth of Christ. We celebrated the baptisms of Natalie, Arian and Yosef (see page 5) and later Holy Communion.



As we prepared to move to the Gathering Space for the baptism Ian and the children lit the Advent Candles for the last Sunday of the Christmas season and then the Christ Candle.



Dave Hall, CYYA pastor began his reflection [‘The Word made flesh’](#) inviting us to *‘imagine, just for a little bit, that the writers of Matthew’s, Mark’s, Luke’s and John’s Gospel are all movie directors – in slightly different eras, targeting slightly different audiences’* taking us through what this might look like. He compared this with *‘A Star is Born, one of those rare films where all of the versions receive critical acclaim’*. Dave drew us then into John’s version saying *‘This is dreaming theology. This is a version of the movie that blows people’s minds. ... The opening scenes of John’s movie ‘John’ are both an introduction and conclusion, exploring both creation and salvation, time and eternity, law and grace, death and life, faith and unbelief, truth and reconciliation.’*



Dave shared a clip of Archbishop Desmond Tutu whose recurring message, dreamtime text, was *‘You are made in God’s image, for goodness’* and concluded *‘And so, when we gather around this communion table shortly, we join in this sacred meal, time beyond our dreaming, with Desmond Tutu joining us in that great communion of the saints.’*



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

> Stewart Lodge

Stewart Lodge is Support Residential Service located in Stewart St., Brunswick. Our congregation has had a long term relationship with a number of past and current residents of Stewart Lodge. One of our most significant traditions has been Stewart Lodge Carols where we gather with the residents in the week before Christmas to sing carols, offer gifts and share supper. In 2020 & 21 we were not been able to gather in this way. So instead we hand wrote personalised cards and baked shortbread to give to the residents.



Card writing - Gwen Arnold obtained the residents’ names, Saide Cameron prepared instructions and the cards (using photos of Soo Lai Yin’s Mary & Elizabeth series) and Nic Batch hosted the card writing session after worship on Sunday 19th December. Thank you to all who gathered so enthusiastically to write on the cards.



Shortbread - Kirsty Bennett coordinated the baking, packaging and delivery of the shortbread. Our thanks to Natalie Sims, Evan Smith, Helen Rowe, Natalie Papworth, Alison Nixon Huang Teck-Lee, Claire Foley and Jenny Hunter for baking the shortbread.

Kirsty writes *Thank you so much for baking shortbread for Stewart Lodge. I dropped it off on the 23rd and they were delighted. Thanks to your efforts, we had enough to not only give each of the 58 residents a bag of shortbread, but to have a plate for their table and give some to staff as well. I am sure they tasted our love and the spirit of Christmas in it.*

Thanks again, Kirsty (on behalf of JAM)



> Act for Peace - Christmas Bowl Appeal

The Christmas Bowl

Our congregation has been a long time supporter of the [Christmas Bowl appeal](#) a much-loved tradition through which 1,800 churches from 18 denominations come together in a powerful demonstration of faith and love to help some of the world's most vulnerable people.

The Christmas Bowl stories were offered each week in the Saturday worship emails:

- adapting to climate change in Central Sulawesi, [Indonesia](#)
- support for children suffering trauma from the [Gaza](#) bombings
- [Sri Lankan refugees](#) returning home
- supporting [Palestinian refugees](#) in Syria
- care for women and girls in [Ethiopia](#) who have experienced gender-based violence



Gift Cards



During the lockdowns this year, Ian Ferguson looked through the lens of his camera at the small things that often go unnoticed. You can order individual cards or any combination. Please pay a minimum of \$2 per card and offer more if you are able.

FUNdraising

Our FUNdraising efforts this year were a combination of Kate Scull's tables of CDs, books, games & puzzles, Gift cards featuring Ian Ferguson's photos, Christmas Cards featuring Soo Lai Yin (Ann)'s Mary & Elizabeth series, Bev Evan's Gingerbread houses and Saide Cameron's preserves, cakes & puddings.

It is not possible to provide a break down of the sales or any indication of how many cards were sold however I can report that **\$1,837.50** was paid into our FUNdraising account ready to be transferred to Act for Peace - thank you to everyone who contributed and made purchases.

The Gift Cards and Preserves ([see current stocklist list](#)) remain available year round in support of the Olive Way. Contact Saide, 0407 096 743.



New summer stock

Donations

In addition to FUNdraising there have been three ways to make donations to support the work of Act for Peace and Christmas Bowl partners:

- open plate after worship - cash and envelopes
- donation through the BUC account: Uniting Church Brunswick, ANZ Bank Brunswick, 013-236 8687863
- online to the [Act for Peace BUC page](#)
The total donated by our congregation as of 14/1/22 is **\$7,324**.

Mal Rowe will continue to receive Christmas Bowl donations using the envelopes available at church in the Gathering Space.

Thank you all for your generous support for the work of the Act for Peace and Christmas Bowl partners. Final figures will be provided in the February Olive Branch.

> Concluding Christmas

The season of Christmas offered a series of services each exploring the story of Jesus' birth in unique and engaging ways. We listened to new & familiar voices from the nativity story, to the voices of our young people, to our liturgists, prayer leaders, musicians and preachers. We reflected on artworks from Emergence, offered Soo Lai Yin (Ann)'s Mary & Elizabeth series as Christmas cards and also for promoting our services, particularly the pageant. We celebrated three baptisms and Holy Communion. Thank you to all who participated in and supported the offering of worship throughout the season.

Give Now

\$129
can give a young child access to health and psychosocial care in Gaza.

\$235
can provide emergency shelter, food and support for an urban refugee family in Ethiopia.

\$490
can provide health kits to help protect 10 refugee families from COVID-19 in Jordan.



Saide Cameron, Editor