

Order of Service 12/12/2023 Blue Christmas

Opening verse:

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. (Luke 2:6)

Gathering

Gathering, Greeting and Call to Worship and Acknowledgement of Country

Jenne

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.

And also with you

Welcome, please gather in the chairs here in the front or in a pew as close as you feel comfortable. You are welcome to move around, to join in with songs and responses or to remain seated throughout the service.

This is the place of Christmas – the land of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people of the Kulin nation. Tonight, as we enter into the mystery of God coming to dwell among us, we acknowledge and honour their elders and ancestors – all those who have called this place home, who live on it now and who may be our partners of reconciliation in the future.

Come as you are, with all that you are. Amidst the bustle of the Christmas season may you find a place of peace here tonight.

Song: Silent Night, TiS 311

*1. Silent night, holy night: all is calm, all is bright
round the virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.*

*2. Silent night, holy night: shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing, 'Alleluia;
Christ the Saviour is born, Christ the Saviour is born.'*

*3. Silent night, holy night: wondrous star, lend your light;
with the angels let us sing Alleluia to our King;
Christ our Saviour is born, Christ our Saviour is born.*

SONG: Silent night, by Joseph Mohr, from Together in Song, Harper Collins Religious, PUBLIC DOMAIN

Introduction to the actions

Jenne

Tonight, during our service, we will hear the Christmas story read in 4 sections and we will light the Advent candles for hope, peace, joy and love. You have been given three pieces of paper – black, white and purple together with pieces of charcoal and chalk. These represent the jagged, stark and sometimes unique nature of loss. Through the service we will explore how and where we find hope, in our village, in our experiences and faith. Cath will invite you to place these

Advent prayers around the table as we prepare to celebrate Holy Communion. We will conclude the service with a time of lighting tapers for your personal prayers. Let us wait in hope for our saviour, for peace & reconciliation in the world. Breathe deep...

Hope and Darkness

Gospel reading

Saide

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.
(Luke 2:1-4)

Advent candle prayer

Cath

As we light our first Advent Candle,
we open ourselves up to Your Hope in our lives.

We light the Advent Candle and remind ourselves
**of the darkness of fear, despair and violence
that we see and encounter in the world.**

We hold on to the hope that we have in you
as we enter this time of waiting and preparing.

Reflection

Jenne

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He returned to his village.

Even in the darkness we have hope, for God is Love, a spark that appears, a glimmer. It's like when we look straight ahead, we can see a movement on the edge of our sight. Maybe it is an Angel there in the dark.

This time of year can be a place of grief, hopes unfulfilled, memories of being alone, or with people you don't want to be with. Whatever your feelings, they are welcome in this space for God sees all of us. The paper you received isn't smooth or neat. The colors are black, white, dark purple, the artists brush a piece of earth, harsh, plain. The pieces don't fit together like a neat jigsaw. For now simply accept what is. Be in those feeling & spaces.

We may also carry with us tonight concerns about events unfolding in the world. The war in Gaza/Palestine, Israel, Ukraine, Russia, our relationship with First Nations people, extreme weather and climate change, the cries of a child wanting peace. Where do we find hope in this darkness? For now, you are invited to come back to the village of sitting, listening, hearing and acceptance. Jesus as the Light has shown us how.

Like the journey Mary and Joseph embarked on, the journey to peace and healing is long, passing through many villages. God's gift comes in small, unexpected ways as we put one foot in front of the other and encounter the love that is always around us. We are not alone.

Let us sing

Song: Advent begins

*Advent begins in the darkness of night,
waiting and watching for signs of a light,
walking in faith that a path will appear,
daring to follow in spite of our fear.*

Advent begins in the darkness of night, (c) Text: David Bjorlin, b.1984; © 2017 GIA Publications, Inc.
Music: RESCOV; Benjamin Brody, b.1975; © 2017 GIA Publications, Inc.

Action

What does darkness look like to you, where do you find hope?
Writing with charcoal on white paper

Peace and Justice

Gospel reading

Jenne

Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:5-7)

Advent prayer

Cath

As we light our second Advent Candle,
we open ourselves up to Your Peace in our lives.

We light the Advent Candle and remind ourselves
**of the of the power of prayer to transform the world,
a world where many suffer at the hands of others.**

We commit ourselves to work and strive for justice
and to speak of peace in this Advent Season.

Reflection

Saide

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

Such powerful prophetic words, it sounds so beautifully serene, peaceful, but we know birthing is anything but peaceful. In her Magnificat, Mary sings of a time of great upheaval. She sings of bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly, of filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty. I wonder if, as she birthed her precious child, she was remembering these prophetic words, if she knew that her baby would pay for this justice seeking with his life, in order to turn the world upside down. Tonight we remember that love is what changes the world.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

We are the body of Christ, called to continue this work, to follow Jesus, seeking justice for asylum seekers, for refugees, for the homeless, the sick, the lowly; to nurture those whom the world is unable to see, hear, love or care for; to care for our planet and all the wonder she holds. We are called to speak, live, breathe God's kingdom message of peace into the world around us.

Breathe now, breathe deep into God's peace. Take this moment to reflect on your own lives. Where do you need the blessing of God's peace? In your homes, your relationships, your work? How is God calling you to seek justice?

Song: Advent begins

*Advent begins in oppression's domain,
marked by the cries of confusion and pain.
Yet hope is kindled where justice is done,
mercy is nurtured and peace is begun.*

Action

What is the peace that you long for, how will you seek justice?

Writing with white chalk on black paper

Joy and Protest

Gospel Reading

Jenne

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord."
(Luke 2:8-11)

Advent prayer

Cath

As we light our third Advent Candle,
we celebrate the Joy of having You in our lives.

We light the Advent Candle and remind ourselves
**that joy can be found in ordinary and extraordinary ways
in prayer and in protest, in working together.**

We open ourselves up to the possibility of joy
and seek to share this joy with others in your name.

Reflection

Saide

The shepherds were keeping watch, the angels appeared with a message "*Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*"

Messages come to us in many guises – words spoken, words on paper, images, actions, gestures. Sometimes, wonderfully, they are messages of great joy – the birth of a longed for child, a visit from a treasured friend or family member, a response to a task done well, a gift received. Often though the messages are hard to hear, hard to process – the loss of family or friends, a life-changing diagnosis, crushed hopes and dreams, lost opportunities.

Take a moment now to recall messages that have been hard for you to hear. How do we live in this tension? How do we hold both the joy and the pain of hard messages? Sometimes all we can do is sit with the hard messages as they gently reshape our living. Sometimes there is more work to be done. In this season we celebrate the joy of the birth of our Saviour already knowing the path he will take; a path of protest and a path that leads to death on a Cross. And then there is the Easter garden beyond, a place of new life.

Let's join our voices with Jesus and all who follow him, holding each other with love and care, lifting our voices in prayer and protest.

Song: Advent begins

*Advent begins with our dreams yet deferred.
Love sounds ridiculous; prayer seems absurd.
But in the midst of life's centreless maze,
we lift together our protest of praise.*

Action

What does joy feel like to you, what protest are you called to make?
Writing with chalk or charcoal on purple paper

Love and Waiting

Gospel Reading

Saide

The angel said, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Luke 2:12-14)

Advent prayer

Cath

As we light our fourth Advent Candle,
we celebrate Your Love.

We light the Advent Candle and remind ourselves that
**You are the source of beauty and love
holding this troubled world in your fathomless care.**

We wait now, we wait to celebrate your birth,
to celebrate love that fills the hungry with good things.

Reflection

Cath

The angel said this will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

In Advent we wait for God to break into our lives in the form of a child. In fact, we are waiting for something that is already here, but we need the eyes of a child in order to really see it. Looking through a child's eyes is not to assume we know how the world is. It is to be open to the transformative and the unexpected. Looking through a child's eyes is to love God and those around us deeply and as if our life depends on it, because as a child it does. Looking through a child's eyes is to feel our vulnerability.

Children are powerless in some ways, but utterly powerful in others. This is the paradox that comes to us at Christmas. Amongst the situations in the world where we feel powerless to stop the violence or conflict, we can still choose to bring compassion and love. Amongst situations in our own lives that are full of grief, there is still the promise of new life. God's love is transformative when we can come like a vulnerable child, open and raw and longing for unconditional love. So in Advent we remind ourselves of this hope; that in the end there will be peace, God desires us to experience joy along the way and holds us in love. If we can endure the hardship of waiting, new life will come.

Song: Advent goes on

*Advent goes on till the promised dawn breaks,
tyrants are toppled, and God's dream awakes.
Hope is perfected and faith is made sight.
Love is our centre and Christ is our light.*

Eucharist

Cath

Tonight we celebrate Holy Communion as a sign of God coming close to us in things we can touch and feel, bread and wine, food for the journey.

In preparation for this, I invite you lay aside that which you have been carrying and offer them up to God. As we sing this next song, bring your pieces of paper and place them around the Table. Remain standing around the table or sit in one of the seats nearby.

Let's sing Infant Holy ...

Song: Infant Holy, TiS 292

1. Infant holy, infant lowly,
for his bed a cattle stall;
oxen lowing little knowing
Christ the babe is Lord of all;
swift are winging angels singing,
nowells ringing, tidings bringing,
Christ the babe is Lord of all,
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

2. Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping
vigil till the morning new
saw the glory, head the story,
tidings of a gospel true;
thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
praises voicing, greet the morrow,
Christ the babe was born for you,
Christ the babe was born for you.

SONG: [Infant Holy](#), from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins Religious, Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502. ALSO Reproduced with permission by CCLI license no. 247623

During communion we gather around a table together and offer our thanks to God. We remember and tell the story of the last meal Jesus ate with his friends and we share sustenance with one another.

So, let us give thanks and I invite you to respond with the words Thank you God

For everything you have created:

Thank you God!

For loving the world so much that you came to dwell among us:

Thank you God!

For guiding us through each day through your Holy Spirit:

Thank you God!

Let us now remember what happened on the night before Jesus died.

Jesus was gathered in an upper room, having a meal with his disciples.
He took a loaf of bread from the table,
said thank you to God, as we have just done
broke it into pieces and gave it to his friends saying,
This is my body given for you. Whenever you eat it,
remember me.

Break bread

After they had eaten, he took a cup of wine and shared it with them saying,
This is my blood poured out in love,
so that no one will ever be separate from God.
Whenever you drink it,
remember me.

Raise cup

In order to come close to God we pray for the Holy Spirit to be with us.
I invite you to respond with the words: ***Come Holy Spirit***

On this bread
Come Holy Spirit

On this cup
Come Holy Spirit

On us all
Come Holy Spirit

Make us one -
one with Jesus,
one with each other,
one family of God.

In the name of God who loves us: ***Amen!***

In the name of Jesus who is with us: ***Amen!***

In the name of the Holy Spirit who helps us every day: ***Amen!***

***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.***

Serving

Cath serves bread, Saide serves juice.

Song: Come now, O God

musicians sing during serving

*Come now, O God, when our love is forsaken.
Come, when our bedrock of faith has been shaken.
Come, when our deepest of hopes are mistaken.
Come, Emmanuel.
Come, Emmanuel.*

*Come, when we squander the freedom you gave us.
Come, break the systems of sin that enslave us.
Come, though we wonder if you can still save us.
Come, Emmanuel.
Come, Emmanuel.*

*Come, lead us out of our self-serving madness.
Come, while the world is enshrouded in sadness.
Come, turn the tears of our mourning to gladness.
Come, Emmanuel.
Come, Emmanuel.*

SONG: [Come now, O God](#), David Bjorlin ©2018, GIA Inc.

The Peace

Cath

May the hope, peace, joy and love of the Christ child be always with you.
And also with you.

Exchange a sign of peace with one another...

A space for prayer

Christmas prayer – Christ Candle

Jenne, Saide

As we light our Christ Candle,
we celebrate You as the Light of the World.

We light the Christ Candle and remind ourselves
**of the ways You overcome the darkness,
and commit ourselves to working for peace & justice.**
We join with you in loving our world
with our breath, with our words, with our actions.

Action

As we sing 'Born in the Night' please come, if you wish, and light a taper for the prayers of your heart.

Song: Born in the night, TiS 323

*1. Born in the night, Mary's child,
a long way from your home;
coming in need, Mary's child,
born in a borrowed room.*

2. *Clear shining light, Mary's child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world, Mary's child,
dawn on our darkened day.*

3. *Truth of our life, Mary's child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true, Mary's child,
go to your cross of wood.*

4. *Hope of the world, Mary's child,
you're coming soon to reign;
King of the earth, Mary's child,
walk in our streets again.*

SONG: Born in the night, by Geoffrey Ainger, from Together in Song, Harper Collins *Religious*, Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502; ALSO Reproduced with permission by CCLI license no. 247623

Sending out

Blessing and Sending

Cath

...

Closing verse:

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

Thank yous

Thank you for joining us, and thank you to...

Liturgists & Reflections:

Saide Cameron
Cath James
Jenne Perlstein

Musicians:

Natalie Sims
(coordinator)
Glenice Cook
Catherine Leslie

Editing/production

Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron