

# Order of Service – 25/12/2023, Christmas Day

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## Opening verse on screen

Isaiah 9:2a: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light

## Call to Worship Isaiah 9:2

Kirsty

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness  
on them light has shined.

## Carol: TIS 268 1,2 & 3, Joy to the World

Kirsty

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- 1. Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her king;  
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*
  - 2. Joy to the world! The Saviour reigns; let us our songs employ;  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*
  - 3. He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.*
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SONG: [Joy to the world](#), by Isaac Watts, 1674-1748,  
from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins Religious, PUBLIC DOMAIN

## Acknowledgement of Country

Kirsty

For the Kulin people, Christmas falls in the Kangaroo-apple season, with its changeable thundery weather and long days. As we gather this morning .

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

Kirsty

Welcome to BUC this Christmas Day! The Advent time of preparation and waiting is over.  
Christ is born. God is with us: Emmanuel.

I am Kirsty and with Helen, Dan, Elaine and many others will be leading worship this morning. In the entry space Sophie has created space for the younger ones among us to decorate Christmas biscuits so please join her when you are ready.

We are offering a low-tech version of livestream today. This means that you will not be able to view the title or song slides on your screens. Instead please go to the service event for today on our website and download the order of service so that you can sing with us.

Our service is shaped by a series of readings, and we will sing carols, listen to reflections and pray prayers as we respond to these.

This year we have created a village during Advent, as we have reflected on all the stories and actions and people that are a part of the Christmas story. It has also taken a village to offer worship this morning and thank you all for your parts in this.

This Advent we have also focused on the traditional themes of Advent, pairing them with another theme, and so we have reflected on hope and darkness, peace and justice, joy and protest, love and waiting.

Today we bring all these themes together as we celebrate the Christ child's birth.

Let's listen now to the words of Isaiah.

### **Hebrew Scriptures – Isaiah 9:6-7**

**Josh and Steph**

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders,  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Great will be his authority,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

### **Prayers of Adoration and Confession**

**Kirsty**

Mighty God  
Wonderful Counsellor  
Saviour, Messiah, Lord  
You are the light of the world.

Everlasting Father  
Prince of Peace  
You are a child born for us  
A Son given to us.

Mary's child, born in the night  
Hope of the world  
Newborn King  
You are Immanuel, God with us.

Holy child of Bethlehem  
Born the king of angels

Word of the Father now in flesh appearing  
You are Christ the Lord!

You are all these things and so much more.  
In you we find hope and darkness,  
peace and justice,  
joy and protest,  
love and waiting.

We adore you.

Forgive us when we put limits on who you are  
When we try to domesticate and tame you,  
And try to shape your story to suit ours.

Forgive us when we do not want to hear your challenge to us  
When we want to see tinsel and Christmas lights,  
And not hear your call to justice and peace.

Amen.

## Word of Grace

Kirsty

Christ is born this day,  
A child who will challenge and change us all.  
A God who loves and forgives,  
Who is full of grace and truth.

And so we can say with confidence:

'Our sin is forgiven'

**Thanks be to God.**

During our next carol, we will light our Advent candles for hope and darkness, peace and justice, joy and protest, love and waiting. And we will light the Christ candle.

If you would like to help light these candles, please come forward now.

## Carol: TIS 293 1 & 2, Unto Us a Child is Born

Kirsty

1. Unto us a child is born!  
King of all creation,  
Came he to a world forlorn  
The Lord of every nation.

2. Cradled in a stall was he  
with sleepy cows and asses;  
but the very beasts could see  
that he us all surpasses.

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SONG: [Unto Us](#), from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins *Religious*, PUBLIC DOMAIN

## Hebrew Scriptures – Isaiah 11:6-9

Linda Wannan

The wolf shall lie with the lamb;  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;  
the calf and the lion will feed together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze;

their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

## Reflection – The four holy threads of Christmas

Dan

Friends, once again, we have completed our Advent journey, and arrived at the manger of the Christ-child. Each week we have built our village by candlelight, weaving together the four sacred threads of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Let's reflect together finally on those four threads, as we complete the Christmas tapestry. For each of those threads is not simply a feeling or a sentiment. Instead, each of them is a conviction. A commitment. Each of them is a load-bearing wall in this church that we share together.

Hope. The first thread. Not merely optimism, or an anticipation of some future pleasure. Hope is the hope of the Wise Ones, who set out on the journey of faith toward an uncertain destination. Hope is the hope of Joseph, who trusts the words of the angels that all will be well. Hope is the hope of Mary's Magnificat, that tyrants will be torn from their thrones, and the lowly will be lifted up. Hope is the hope of Revelation. It is the hope of the new heaven and the new earth. Hope holds tenaciously to the promises of God. To hope is to live in the conviction that the world is not a barren and meaningless place. That goodness is at work and running under the surface to nourish new life.

Peace. The second thread. Not merely the absence of pain or fear. Peace is the peace of the animals grazing at the side of Jesus' cradle. A vision of creation gathered together in harmony. Peace is the quiet stars in the dark sky. Peace is the mother sleeping as her child sleeps, after labour. Peace is an ethic. It is a principle of action. It rejects war, it rejects oppression, it cannot abide poverty. It is restless in its yearning for the safety and well-being of all God's children. It is uncomfortable in abundance that is not shared. It is impatient with wealth that is stored up. It thirsts for justice.

Thirdly, Joy. Not pleasure. Not even happiness. Joy is the recognizing kick of the baby in Elizabeth's womb. Joy is the uncomprehending wonder of the shepherds on the hill. Joy is the laughter of angels amidst their song of praise and glory. Joy is a safely-delivered baby in the arms of his mother. Joy is the life that does not seek satisfaction in materialism, in consumption, in achievement, but in the in-dwelling of the joy of the spirit. The cultivated presence of God that is reflected in the love that we share with our community, the beauty of Creation, and the urging inner-voice that tells us that life is worth living. That it is a gift.

Finally, love. The greatest of all. Not sentimentality. Not a temporary feeling of passion or nostalgia. Love is our law. It is our constitution. It is our judge and our government. It is our yardstick and our scale. It speaks in our heart in no uncertain terms, to tell us what it requires. Love longs for reconciliation and forgiveness. It insists on mercy. It is patient and it is kind. Love is not proud, but it will fight for what is right. It is not jealous, but will make sacrifices for justice. Love is revealed in the child Jesus, God incarnate, who shares our life in the world. It is the love of the Holy family. It is in love that the world is made, and toward love that all things bend. We love because God first loved us.

These are the four holy threads of Christmas. Let us continue to reflect on them together as we sing our next carol.

## Carol: TIS 316 1 & 2, Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

Dan

1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see you lie!  
Above your deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:  
yet, in your dark streets shining the everlasting light,  
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight.

2. For Christ is born of Mary; and, gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars together proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing and voices ring with peace to all on earth.

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SONG: [O little town of Bethlehem](#), by Phillips Brooks, from [Together in Song](#), (adapted) Harper Collins *Religious*, PUBLIC DOMAIN

## Gospel Reading – Luke 2:1, 3-7

Anya

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

## Early Word

Helen

Through Advent we have been building a village. We have lots of villages in our lives, school, work, family and our Church is our village.  
Our village is made up of the people who feed us, entertain us, care for us, teach us, lead us, welcome us, paint pictures for us and make us laugh. We all have lots of roles.  
Helping to organise the service is one of my roles today so I got to choose my favourite Christmas Carols.

What are your favourites?

I have been looking at the history of Christmas Carols.  
Where do they come from?

The word Carol comes from the French word Carole, meaning to sing and dance holding hands in a circle.

St. Francis of Assisi, is thought to have introduced the Carole and also the Nativity Scene in the thirteenth century, to remind people of the Christmas Story.

Carols and paintings were used to teach people who couldn't read or write. Simple stories, with repetitive words, and choruses are easy to learn and remember.

This is how people learned the stories of Christmas, Mary and Joseph, the Journey, the Birth, the Shepherds, and the Angels.

My choice for this reading, The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy, is a Spiritual from the West Indies, with no known composer.

This Carol has all these things, simple, repetitive words, giving hope and comfort to people living in slavery.

So let's enjoy singing and dancing the Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy. A Spiritual from the West Indies, with a Calypso feel, first composed and sung by slaves.

## Carol: TIS 307 1 & 2, The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy

Helen

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1. *The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,  
the Virgin Mary had a baby boy,  
the Virgin Mary had a baby boy,  
and they say that his name was Jesus.*

*He come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom,  
He come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom,  
O yes, believer, O yes, believer, he come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom.*

2. *The angels sang when the baby born,  
the angels sang when the baby born,  
the angels sang when the baby born,  
and proclaim him the baby Jesus.*
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SONG: [The Virgin Mary](#), West Indies spiritual, from [Together in Song](#),  
Harper Collins *Religious*, Reproduced with permission ONE LICENCE # 604502

## **Gospel Reading – Luke 2:8-16**

**Meg**

Now in that same 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 Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

## **Reflection - Jesus, Immanuel, God With Us**

**Dan**

Friends, Merry Christmas! Today is a happy day. We call it a day of peace, and goodwill, and joy.

But I wonder if there is any part of you that feels uncomfortable with that. Is Christmas a happy day for you? Perhaps you feel that it is not right to be happy today. That there is too much pain in the world. There is too much want. There is too much inequality. The earnest suffering of Palestinians and Israelis and Russians and Ukrainians and Yeminis and Sudanese and the Rohingya is so acute, so unrelenting, that it is intolerable today to be content.

I think we all share in some measure in that discomfort. If we did not, we would have strayed far from the way of Jesus.

As you hold that feeling in your heart, I invite you to think carefully on the name that the angels give to Jesus. Immanuel. What does that mean? ‘God with us.’

Notice how important it is that Immanuel does not mean, ‘God is with me.’

For that is always the greatest and most dangerous error of religion. As soon as I believe ‘God is with me’ I run invariably into the interest of my neighbour. When the athlete prays for success,



they collide immediately with the prayer that their opponent prays at the far end of the field. When the teacher on a school excursion prays for a clear day, they compete with the farmer who prays earnestly for rain. Two nations at war, each pray for victory. It cannot be so.

When I believe in Immanuel, 'God with Me' I can be proud and haughty because God has blessed me above my neighbour. I can store up my wealth because God has reaped for me a special harvest. I can walk past the beggar on the street because their sinfulness has put them there. I can detest people of other faiths and none, because I am God's chosen one. I can be a terrorist, because God's cause is my cause. I can be a crusader and a colonizer, because God wills it. I can stretch out the hand of my power with bombs and guns and landmines, because God has elected my people.

God forbid us from 'God with me', religion.

Now does that mean we should not pray special prayers into our own circumstances? That God does not care for us in our unique individuality? Never. At Christmas, it is the earnest word of God to you that you are known, that you are loved, that you are treasured, and that you are not alone. Our God is the God that Jesus calls 'Father', that word of intimate love and relationship. You, you, you, capture the entirety of God's attention. The entirety of God's love. God counts the hairs on your head.

But we must not deceive ourselves. If today we are peaceful, and happy, and content, it is not because God loves us more. It is not because God has ordained that some people should have much and some people should have little. It is not because we matter more to God than all the peoples of the world who today long for peace and security and food, or who weep and grieve over those they have lost and fear for. It is only because we have not yet done enough to bring into being the Kingdom of hope, peace, joy, and love for the whole earth. God's Good News of Christmas is always for all people, for all the children of God. Your rights are your neighbour rights. Your neighbour's tears are your tears, your neighbour's want is your want. Your neighbour's pain is your pain.

I hope today is a happy day for you. The love and hospitality that we share with our friends and our family and our neighbour is one of the ways that we bring light into the world. There is no guilt in it.

But hold in your heart the name of Jesus, Immanuel, God With Us. Let that name grow in you, change you, remind you that you do not have God's special and unique favour, except that infinite and perfect love that abides in every human being. Let it remind you that privilege and wealth comes with responsibility. And let it drive you toward little acts of peace, charity, mercy, and love with which the Christ is building his kingdom.

Amen.

## **Carol: TIS 309 1 & 2, Angels from the Realms of Glory**

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**Dan**

- 1. Angels, from the realms of glory  
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
Heralds of creation's story  
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.*

*Come and worship Christ the newborn King.  
Come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.*

- 2.*
  - 3. Shepherds, in the field abiding,  
Watching over flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing;  
Yonder shines the infant light:*
-

## Gospel Reading – John 1:1-5

Anne Z

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

## Prayers of the People (including Xmas Bowl)

Helen (Kirsty)

### Introduction

Helen

Helen: Our prayers today will focus on the places in the world being assisted by the Act for Peace Christmas Bowl Appeal. All offerings made today (into the bowls by the baptism font or in this bowl on the communion table) will go to the Christmas Bowl (online offerings via the Christmas Bowl website). First let's hear the story of a father and his children – a Christmas Bowl story.

### Christmas Bowl Story

Kirsty

Kirsty: Meh Reh fled Myanmar more than 29 years ago. Living in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border ever since, he hopes that one day it will be safe for him and his family to return home.

Thousands continue to flee Myanmar to this day, but with the emergency no longer in the headlines, they are left out of sight and out of mind, trapped in a devastating limbo. Meh Reh prays that the world hasn't forgotten them.

Our gifts through the Christmas Bowl can help Act for Peace's local partners provide practical care so refugees and people who have been displaced can live in safety and dignity and know that they are loved and not forgotten. We can give hope in these dark times.

### Prayers of the People

Helen

Joy to the World the Lord is come, the waiting is over  
and the Baby is born, bringing light into the world. God with us.  
These are our prayers, in both joy and grief.

In grief we pray for our World Village.  
For the earth itself and all the wonders it contains, your creation.  
For floods, fires and melting ice caps, caused by global warming, and the suffering it causes.  
Shine your light into our darkness.

In hope we pray for the billions who inhabit this earth, all your creation.  
For those who know you and those who don't.  
Shine your light into our darkness.

In despair we pray for the end of war, for all who are caught up  
in the brutality inflicted on the innocent and displaced.  
Shine your light into our darkness.

In hope we pray for our community village.  
We woke up today to the joy of Christmas, family and friends.  
But Christmas can be a difficult time and we pray for everyone  
who wakes in hunger, poverty, sickness, homelessness, despair, anger and loneliness.  
Shine your light into our darkness.

In love we pray for our Church Village.



In this time of searching for a new Minister, we give thanks and pray,  
for everyone in our community who works so hard to keep us focussed on our purpose,  
to share your love with all we meet.  
Shine your light into our darkness.

Hope, love and light has come into the world, for Unto us a Child is Born, God with us.  
So in the name of the Father of Creation, the Mother of Mercy, Jesus the light of the World  
and the Spirit of Comfort, we pray,  
Shine your light into our darkness.  
Amen

## Carol: TIS 323 1, 2 & 4, Born in the Night

Helen

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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.*

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.*

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SONG: [Born in the night](#), by Geoffrey Ainger, from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins *Religious*,  
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## Gospel Reading – John 1:6-14

Ralph and Hugh

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

## Blessing and Sending

Kirsty

Christ is born today:  
A child, who is the Messiah and Saviour.  
Emmanuel, God with us.

He comes into the world  
to break down barriers,  
to offer love, and bring hope to everyone.

Let us go out and live in this Christmas love,  
Striving for peace, and acting with kindness,  
Knowing that the Christ child goes with us.

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1 *O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
come and behold him born the king of angels:  
O come let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

6 *Sing choirs of angels, sing in exaltation,  
sing all ye citizens of heaven above,  
'Glory to God, glory in the highest':  
O come let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

7 *Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,  
Jesus, to thee be glory given;  
Word of the Father now in flesh appearing:  
O come let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

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

## Thank yous

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

Liturgist:  
Kirsty Bennett

Early Word &  
Prayers of the People:  
Helen Burnham

Images:  
Saide Cameron

Bible readers:  
Hugh Brown  
Ralph Eduardo  
Steph Gesling  
Anya Kvensakul  
Meg Orton  
Linda Wannan  
Joshua Whitty  
Ann Zevis

Reflections:  
Daniel Broadstock

Editing / Production:  
Daniel Broadstock  
Ray Cameron  
Saide Cameron  
Christine Hornby  
Mal Rowe  
Jamie Thom

Musicians:  
Elaine Potter  
(co-ordinator)  
Glenice Cook  
Helen Burnham  
Mikul Denison  
Nicole Lowe

## Closing verse on screen

'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 Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord' Luke 2:10-11