

Parramatta Community
Uniting Church

Leigh Memorial
Uniting Church

a d v e n t 4



24 December, 2023

WELCOME

A warm welcome as we gather together and enter the Advent season of hope, peace, joy and love.

NOTICES

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge that we are on the land of the Burramattagal people of the Darug Nation and that the Spirit was in the land revealing God to them through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the Burramattagal people and gave them particular insights into God's ways. Therefore, we honour the wisdom of the Burramattagal Elders and their continuing culture and pray that we might all work together for reconciliation and justice in this nation.

(Using words from the Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution)

LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLES

The three Advent candles of hope, peace and joy are lit.

God turns the world upside down.

God's reign of justice and renewal is near.

Our hearts rejoice in God's Good News!

God has come among us with love. God is coming again.

And so, as we wait, we light the candle of love.

We light the fourth candle of love.

SONG **I got peace like a river** *(Adapted, African American spiritual)*

1. I've got hope like a rainfall, I've got hope like a rainfall.

I've got hope like a rainfall in my soul.

I've got hope like a rainfall, I've got hope like a rainfall.

I've got angels around me and I'm whole.

2. I've got peace like a river; I've got peace like a river;

I've got peace like a river in my soul.

I've got peace like a river, I've got hope like a rainfall.

I've got angels around me and I'm whole.

3. I've got joy like a fountain; I've got joy like a fountain;

I've got joy like a fountain, in my soul

I've got peace like a river; I've got hope like a rainfall;

I've got angels around me, and I'm whole.

4. I've got love like an ocean; I've got love like an ocean;

I've got love like an ocean, in my soul

I've got joy like a fountain, I've got peace like a river;

Touched by hope and blessed by angels, I am whole.

GATHERING & SILENT REFLECTION

Conceive the Child

We are all meant to be mothers of God.

What good is it to me

if this eternal birth of the divine Child
takes place unceasingly,
but does not take place within myself?
And, what good is it to me
if Mary is full of grace
if I am not also full of grace?
What good is it to me
for the Creator to give birth to God's Child
if I do not also give birth to the Christ Child
in my time and my culture?
This, then, is the fullness of time:
When the Child of Humanity is begotten in us.

Meister Eckhart 1260-1328, adapted

The House of Christmas

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All ... are at home...
A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam;
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home.

G. K. Chesterton

FIRST LESSON *Those Who Saw the Star*

Isaiah 9:2-6a

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.
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you, for the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For a child has been born for us, a child given to us;

Those Who Saw the Star

The Word became Light,
The Word became History.
The Word became Conflict,
The Word became Indomitable Spirit,
and sowed its seeds...
and those-of-good-will, heard the angels sing.
Tired knees were strengthened, trembling hands were stilled, and the people who
wandered in darkness saw the light!
Then,
The Word became flesh in a nation-pregnant-with-freedom,
The Spirit strengthened the arms which forged Hope,
The Word became flesh in the people who perceived a new day...
The Word became the seed-of-justice and we conceived peace.
Grace and Truth celebrated together

in the laughter of the children rescued by life.
And the Word shall continue sowing futures in the furrows of Hope.
And on the horizon the Word made light invited us to relive a thousand dawns
toward the new world that comes...

SECOND LESSON *People of Ceaseless Hope*

Luke 1:26ff

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The woman's name was Mary. And Gabriel came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! Our God is with you.' But she was much perplexed by these words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a child, whom you will name Jesus.'

People of Ceaseless Hope *Walter Burghardt*

[We] must be [people] of ceaseless hope...Every human act, every Christian act, is an act of hope. But that means [we] must be [people] of the present, [we] must live this moment - really live it, not just endure it - because this very moment, for all its imperfection and frustration, because of its imperfection and frustration, is pregnant with all sorts of possibilities, is pregnant with the future, is pregnant with love, is pregnant with Christ.

HYMN **Rejoice! Rejoice!** *(Tune: 'O Come Emmanuel')*

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel.
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until a Liberator is near.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Our freedom is at hand.
The Dawn of Justice shines upon the land.*
2. Come now, dear friends, for Advent time is here;
It's time to cast out doubt and crippling fear -
For presently, before our wondering eyes,
This season will bring forth its own surprise.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Our freedom is at hand.
The Dawn of Justice shines upon the land.*
3. O come, O Wisdom, sister of us all,
Prepare our ears to hear a wondrous call.
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in your ways to go.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Our freedom is at hand.
The Dawn of Justice shines upon the land.*
4. Let us together ponder how we may
Initiate a new and better day.
In numbers we are strong, our faith is great;
No more delay lest justice come too late.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Our freedom is at hand.

The Dawn of Justice shines upon the land.

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THIRD LESSON *First Coming*

Matthew 1:18-21

Now the birth of Jesus the One sent from God took place in this way. When Jesus' mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of God appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a child, whom you are to name Jesus, for your child will save God's people

First Coming

God did not wait till the world was ready, till...the nations were at peace.
God came when the heavens were unsteady, and prisoners cried out for release.
God did not wait for the perfect time.
God came when the need was deep and great.
God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.
God did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours of anguished shame God came,
and God's light would not go out.
God came to a world which did not mesh, to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of Word made Flesh the Maker of the stars was born.
We cannot wait til the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain, God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!
Madeleine L'Engle

FOURTH LESSON *It is midnight upon the earth*

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor 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 child, wrapped the child in bands of cloth, and laid the child in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In the Middle of the Night

Then you chose to come.
God's resplendent first-born sent to make us one.
The voices of doom protest:
"All these words about justice, love and peace—
All these naïve words will buckle beneath the weight
of a reality which is brutal and bitter, ever more bitter."

It is true, O Christ, it is midnight upon the earth,
moonless night and starved of stars.
But can we forget that You, the son of God, chose to be born
precisely at midnight?

by Dom Helder Camara

CAROL **O Little Town of Bethlehem**

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 to god the king,
And peace to all on earth.

3. How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive Him still,
the dear Christ enters in.

4. O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in;
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels,
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Christ Emmanuel!

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FIFTH LESSON

To the poor shepherds by night

Luke 2:8-14

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of God stood before them, and the glory of God 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. 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 God favours!"

CAROL *While sheperds watched (vs 1, 2, 3, 4) tis 299*

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
An angel of the lord came down
And glory shone around.

2 "Fear not," said he for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind
"glad tidings of great joy i bring
To you and all mankind.

3. 'to you in david's town this day
Is born of david's line
A saviour, who is christ the lord;
And this shall be the sign:

4. 'the heavenly babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swaddling clothes
And in a manger laid.'

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SIXTH LESSON

In choosing to be born

Matthew 2: 1-2

After Jesus was born in Bethleham in Judea during the time of King Herod Magi(al from the east came to Jerusalem and asked "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw this One's star in the east and have come to worship this child."

In Choosing to Be Born

In choosing to be born for us, God chose to be known by us. God therefore reveals God's own self in this way, in order that this great sacrament of love may not be an occasion for us of great misunderstanding. Today the Magi find, crying in a manger, the one they have followed, shining in the sky. Today the Magi see clearly, in swaddling clothes, the one they have long awaited, laying hidden among the stars. Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, humanity in God, God in humanity, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body.

by Peter Chrysologus, 5th Century

CAROL

Canticle of the Turning (Magnificat)

a hymn by Rory Cooney

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7fTuH_0agE

1. My soul cries out with a joyful shout

that the God of my heart is great,
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things
that you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,
and my weakness you did not spurn,
So from east to west shall my name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?
*My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn!*

2. Though I am small, my God, my all,
you work great things in me,
And your mercy will last from the depths of the past
to the end of the age to be.
Your very name puts the proud to shame,
and to those who would for you yearn,
You will show your might, put the strong to flight,
for the world is about to turn. *Chorus*

3. From the halls of power to the fortress tower,
not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware for your justice tears
ev'ry tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor shall weep no more,
for the food they can never earn;
There are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed,
for the world is about to turn. *Chorus*

4. Though the nations rage from age to age,
we remember who holds us fast:
God's mercy must deliver us
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.
This saving word that our forebears heard
is the promise which holds us bound,
'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God,
who is turning the world around. *Chorus*

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

Loving God, at your coming
the angels sang a message of peace and good will.
We pray for all people who long still to hear your message of peace.
Those whose lives are shattered by war;
For victims of hatred and persecution;
for victims of domestic violence;
for refugees and asylum seekers.

Jesus, hope of the world, hear our prayer.

Loving God, at your coming you are born into a family,

sharing our human joys and sorrows.
We pray for our families and friends,
and all with whom our lives are bound:
for those separated from loved ones:
and those who will spend Christmas alone.

Jesus, hope of the world, hear our prayer.

Loving God, at your coming you make your place
with the unwanted and poor.
We pray for all for whom society finds no room.
For the homeless, the outcast, the friendless and the unloved;
For the sick and the dying and for all who minister to them.

Jesus, hope of the world, hear our prayer.

OFFERING

Just as God gives to us, so let us give to others now.
O God, we can never match your generosity.
Yet, we pray in faith for your blessing
on all that we offer to you now.
May we honour all that you teach us as we use these gifts. ***Amen.***

SEVENTH LESSON

Jesus, come to my house, to my country, to the world of humanity this Christmas

They told me that you came back to be born every Christmas. . . with this stubborn gesture of coming back every Christmas you are trying to tell us something: That the revolution that all proclaim begins first of all in each one's heart. That it doesn't mean only changing structures but changing selfishness for love. That we have to stop being wolves and return to being brothers and sisters, That we . . . begin to work seriously for individual conversion and social change, that will give to all the possibility of having bread, education, freedom, and dignity.

That you have a message that's called the Gospel, and a Church, and that's us -- A Church that wants to be servant of all, a Church that knows that because God became human one Christmas there is no other way to love God but to love all people. If that's the way it is, Jesus, come to my house this Christmas, Come to my country, Come to the world of humanity.

And first of all, come to my heart.
Che Jesus, Anonymous, Argentina

CAROL

Joy to the World

TiS 268

1. Joy to the world! The Christ is here!
The gift of peace to bring!
Let ev'ry heart a welcome place prepare.
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing!
2. Joy to the earth! The saviour lives!
With song your voice employ;
While fields and floods, rock, plains and hills
Repeat the sounding joy,

Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy!
3. Christ fills the world with truth and grace,
And asks each life to prove
The glories of God's righteousness
And wonders of God's love,
And wonders of God's love,
And wonders, and wonders of God's love!

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BLESSING

Go in peace.
May the love that made the stars,
Be your guiding light.
May the love revealed in Jesus
Be your hope and inspiration;
And may the love of the ever-present Spirit
Give you courage, joy and hope,
Now and forever.
Amen.