



Sunday Dec 5th, 2021 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:78-9

Our first candle is for the prophets who proclaimed that the Messiah would come, and called us to be ready.

Light first Advent candle

Our second candle is for John the Baptist who prepared the way of the Lord.

Light second Advent candle

As we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, Open our hearts to the wonder and joy of the season.

May we do our part in preparing for the coming of the Lord.

Call to worship

Christmas is coming, rejoice!
Soon the Christ Child will be born
Bringing light into the darkness.
We rejoice in the coming of the Light of the World.

A voice cries out in the wilderness:
It is John the Baptist shouting, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord.’

‘Every valley shall be filled up,
every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough road shall be made smooth,
and all of humankind shall see God’s salvation.’

Acknowledging



As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay our respect to elders past, present and emerging and commit ourselves and our church to listening, learning and keeping the covenant as we walk together, First and Second Peoples.

Singing TIS 270 - On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
come, then, and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every heart from sin;
make straight the way for God within;
prepare we in our hearts a home,
where such a mighty guest may come.

For you are our salvation, Lord,
Our refuge, and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out your hand
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth, and let your light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.

To him who left the throne of heaven
to free us all, let praise be given;
and praise be to the Father done,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One.

W: Charles Coffin tr. John Chandler
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Prayer

In this season of watching, waiting, and preparing may we be inspired by the courage of the prophets, including Malachi, and of John the Baptist who fearlessly proclaimed the coming of the Lord.

May we be inspired and encouraged, as we worship, to think of how, we too, could share this Good News this week.

As Paul, in the book of Philippians proclaimed his gratitude for the way in which that the church at Philippi has supported him, we confess that we have sometimes failed to support those in need around us - **Lord, have mercy.**

He, also, commended their commitment to sharing in the work of proclaiming the Gospel. We confess that our evangelical efforts have often been half-hearted, reluctant and embarrassed.

Christ, have mercy.

Paul thanked the Philippians for the way they have always held him in their hearts, and shown him love. We confess that we struggle to always be loving and caring.

Lord, have mercy.

Paul prayed, "that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:9-11)

We pray that our love, too, may overflow, knowing that in the forgiveness and love of God in Jesus Christ, all things are possible.

Thanks be to God!

Listening

Read: Malachi 3:1-4 & Luke 3:1-6

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:
Thanks be to God.

Reflecting - Rev. Ian Brown

Malachi is not often on lists of favorite books. We don't know much about the writer. The name comes from mal'ak, meaning ambassador, angel or messenger. The book opens with, "The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi." – footnote: by my messenger. So it's a message to Israel.

Malachi, last of the minor prophets, opens a host of issues and leaves blank the small matters of who and how and when, but it's rich with imagery;

'See, I am sending my messenger (my mal'ak) to prepare the way before me, ... indeed, he is coming, says the Lord. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi.'

At 961 celsius, molten silver is a beautiful and dangerous thing! Glowing red, fluid silver takes a huge amount of energy. Silver is purified by melting. That's hot, dangerous work. Malachi seems to be familiar with the technique. Refining metal is used as a metaphor for warning.

The refiner's task was painstaking, hands on and dangerous. Breaking up ore to be melted in a small crucible, the heat had to be raised until the silver or gold melted and began to separate from whatever else might be present. The impurities rise and could be scraped off, eliminating the dross. The point is to remove impurities that would spoil the result and the value. Malachi's warning is aimed at priests in the temple, as much as a Royal Commission into child abuse or into banking institutions have sought to fix the problems in those areas now. God, like a royal



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commissioner will sit as refiner, apply the blowtorch and deal with the dross. It's about cleaning up, in preparation for God's intervention.

It's the mood of Advent; watching the signs, cleaning up, preparing. Looking at the signs of the times and preparation are still relevant, as is looking at the signs in nature. Perhaps we look at different indicators, but it's never less urgent.

The preparing at the beginning of all four Gospels, sees John the Baptist appear as a figure to be reckoned with. He is dynamic, demanding, difficult! He comes quoting and fulfilling the words of prophets, stirring up the people and making waves in society.

In John's society there were painfully clear needs. Poverty and oppression were rife. John spoke his truth in the wilderness, people heard and responded to;
"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

The words about preparing were directed at attitudes, at motivations and from there, directed at our actions and justice. Perhaps today it might sound more like this:
"There's a voice crying out in the bush, or from a remote social media platform: 'Get ready, straighten yourself up, clear some space for God in your lives.'"

John asks us "What are the obstacles that stop the way of Christ coming more completely here? What gets in the way of peace and hope?"

I imagine a John-like character crying out in West Papua, where oppressive interests push roads into untouched wilderness for mines, destroying villages and culture for profit. I could see one on the Ukraine and the Polish border; crying out 'prepare the way of peace'.
There are many voices crying in the wilderness today - in which the voice of God is still heard. And if we listen, then what will we do?

On this second Sunday of Advent, hear the good news. "To those who are oppressed, lost, forgotten and hopeless, to all who yearn for fullness of life - God is making a way." John reminds us that we must prepare the way to hear - to open our ears and our lives. To be open now to God's coming in Christ: Prepare the way!

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

God of hope, as we enjoy the anticipation of Advent, and prepare for the joy of the coming of the Christ Child at Christmas, we give thanks for all of those who shared the Christian faith and its traditions and stories with us.

We are blessed by this immeasurable gift of faith, but we realise that there are so many around us who do not share this gift of faith, and who may not even know the Christmas story.
So, we pray that we, and all your Church, may be able to find creative ways to share the Good News contained in the Christmas story this year.

Bless the work of Uniting and other church agencies as they share your love in practical ways. Bless the work of Medicins sans Frontiers (Doctors without Borders), and all other agencies working in dangerous places to bring help and healing.
We pray also for those in the front line in the battle against COVID 19, and those seeking to combat leprosy, malaria, HIV AIDS, Ebola, and other dangerous and debilitating illnesses. We pray that rich nations may share generously with those who are poor.

We pray for peace, O God. We pray for peacemakers and peacekeepers. We pray that peace will come to Ethiopia, South Sudan, and all other war torn places. We pray that this year, Christmas will be able to be celebrated in peace in Bethlehem and other strife riven places.

We pray for the people and places that are on our hearts this day-



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Time for silent prayer

We pray for healing for the sick and comfort for those who mourn.

Be with all who are lonely or struggling, and those who are far from home.

Be particularly with the Pacific Islander workers in our midst.

And be with us, may we seek to always be your faithful people as we pray:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,

your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Passing the peace

May the Peace of God dwell with you:
and also with you.

Offering

With love and hope in our hearts, we offer our gifts and our lives to you, O God, trusting that you will use them in the work of your kingdom.

May they be used to share your love and peace.
Amen.

Notices

Advent is a time to reflect on and prepare for the gift of Jesus - God is with us.

Singing - TIS 284

O bless the God of Israel

O bless the God of Israel
who comes to set us free;
who visits and redeems us,
with love for all to see.
The prophets spoke of mercy,
of rescue and release:
God shall fulfill his promise
and bring our people peace.

He comes! the Child of David,
the Son whom God has given;
he comes to live among us
and raise us up to heaven:
before him goes his servant-
forerunner in the way,
the prophet of salvation,
the herald of the Day.

Where once were fear and darkness
the sun begins to rise-
the dawning of forgiveness
upon the sinner's eyes.
He guides the feet of pilgrims
along the paths of peace:
O bless our God and Saviour
with songs that never cease.

W: Michael Arnold Perry
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Blessing

Go out into the world ready to proclaim the coming of the Lord, holding tight to the hope God has given you, and seeking to be a blessing to those you meet this week.

Go in hope, go in peace, go in joy, and go in love.
Amen.

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