



Sunday Dec 12th, 2021 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

To our Advent expectation, gracious God, add a depth of breath-taking wonder at your astonishing incarnation.

To our season's busy-ness and years of pandemic weariness, add a healthy dose of eye-watering gratitude for your fearless, gentle coming to us.

To our well accustomed hearing of old tunes and tales, give us your antidote of humble circumstance, simple joy and the promise of new beginning birthed among us. For in Jesus we pray. Amen

Call to worship

One: The peace and joy of Christ,
the coming one be with you all.

All: And also with you

One: On this third Sunday of Advent
we light three candles.
This third candle reminds us
of the promise of joy in Jesus' coming.

**All: We wait for you, Jesus Christ
We see the joyful light
of your life before us**

Acknowledging



As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

Singing - Come to be our hope, TiS 688

Can be sung to ODE TO JOY words: Jaci Maraschin
Used with permission CCLI 206 729

Come to be our hope, O Jesus,
come to set our people free.
From oppression, come release us,
you alone give liberty.

Come release from every prison
those who suffer in our land.
In your love we find the reason
still to live and understand.

Come to build your new creation;
show the way of servanthood,
give new life to every nation,
changing evil into good.
Come and open our tomorrow
for a kingdom now so near.
Take away all human sorrow,
give us hope against our fear.



Prayer

Isaiah 12 – our psalm for the day with visual link:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/rxmv6f2n554ri7h/Isa12adv.m4v?dl=0>

Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation.
And you will say in that day:
Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.
Sing praises to the Lord,
for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

God of light and grace who calls us to trust,
shine in our hearts with all the joy of your coming
Son. At the edge of our awareness is a tingling
sense of expectation, thankfully not limited to the
confines of church. In the depths of our being is a
yearning that rouses like a sleeper awakening...
and it finds its answer in the promise of your
coming one; Immanuel.

God of joy who calls us to sing,
we look for a renewed awareness, a deeper
yearning and a more complete coming in our
lives. Deliver us from trusting the bright lights of
our time, and from the glitter of distraction. Bring

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us into the light where we can see you with wonder and openness.

Help us come clean with you, God and place our hope in your hands: If in the light of Advent joy we see we have lived pushing happiness away, as if Christ had never come weaving parables of grace and with actions of loving compassion; Lord forgive us.

If in the light of Advent hope we see we have lived as if Jesus' coming has been relegated to history, leaving behind his coming to us now in the sorrows and the happiness of our experience; Lord forgive us.

If in the light of Advent clarity we see we have sometimes lived dutiful lives, but grimly as if Christ has not come in glory as the fulfilment of grace and truth; holy God, forgive our mistake.

Forgive us the times we fail to be practical in faith, adventurous in hope and generous in love. Forgive the discouragement we have caused others, and the misery we serve on ourselves. Restore us again in joy, so whole in spirit we live with profound trust and joyful devotion, through Christ. Amen!

Be glad then, as we hear the transforming words of good news in Christ: we are made new, made whole: **Thanks be to God! Amen**

Listening

Read: Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Philippians 4: 4-7

Luke 3: 7-18

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:

Thanks be to God.

Reflecting - Rev. Deacon Wendy Elson

When I was growing up I thought I had the salvation thing sorted. I was going to wait until the day before I die and then repent and ask for forgiveness. Seems I am not the only one to have these thoughts because it turns out that the people in John's time were way ahead of me.

They wanted to just get baptized and get on with life. Well, I am not sure that John could be much clearer on his views on this plan! It is not our baptism itself that will save us (or any other forms of our religion perhaps). It is the desire to seek justice, the sharing of all we have and all we are with those who are in need in some way. Dorothy Day is quoted as saying that if we have two coats we have stolen one from the poor. This is such a challenge to me, to live simply and share. It seems that salvation does not sit in any one personal act of repentance and 'conversion' but rather in who we are, in regards to our treatment of one another. We are the agents of salvation and transformation for others.

But I want to focus on the Zephaniah passage for a moment. This little book hidden away at the end of the Old Testament is one of the lesser-known prophets (the ones we may well have trouble locating and need to use the index). Nahum and Habakkuk and Zephaniah were likely contemporaries speaking during the Babylonian crisis and he is forewarning of coming judgement. He ends however, with a song of joy. If you have a Christmas Wreath with a pink candle for Advent 3 it represents joy and this Sunday is sometimes known as "Gaudete (meaning 'Rejoice') Sunday".

In this passage God is joyous, totally elated and engulfed by joy. This book that begins with the threat of eradication ends with a joyous God. Evil will be no more. Even in our failures and our struggles, God has hold of us. The people are redeemed and forgiven and, in words echoed through the gospels, told not to fear because the compassionate God is present with them. The people are renewed in God's love.

The final verses make clear that God is on the side of the oppressed and not the oppressor. God sides with the lame and the outcast and deals with those who are the oppressors. There is no fence-sitting for any of us on this point. If we do not stand with the oppressed, we stand with the oppressor. And then in the final verse, God will gather us and bring us home. I wonder how I would hear these promises if I was homeless, or

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outcast. If I was a refugee or dispossessed and longing for home. How does it sit with our First Peoples?

And so we rejoice in the Lord always for God is present with us and stands with the vulnerable and the marginalized. Shout aloud and sing for joy. God loves liberation. Free now of judgement Israel can move on into true freedom and homecoming. Free to indulge in this space of mercy and grace and peace, the peace which passes all understanding. I sure am glad I don't have to wait until the day before I die.

Singing: Joy to the world TiS 268

words: Isaac Watts 1674-1748 *alt* music: W. Holford c. 1834
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Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
let earth receive its king;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns;
let us our songs employ;
while fields and streams, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

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.

Responding: Prayers for World & Community

We've had our eyes open enough God,
to be reminded by the news
and to have noticed in ourselves
that there is a mountain of stuff that needs fixing.
And we know that you are concerned too,

and call us to join you in your loving concern for us all. The echo of the Baptist's cry still finds its targets:

- the broods of vipers who manipulate desperate refugees for their political gain,
the axe at the root of the fossil fuel industry for choking the planet – please God!
- and all the places we need to repent in our own practices.
Please God, help us to actions that bear good fruit for all in our sick, sorry and nervous world.

So we pray for our church; for a renewed vision and a lively open compassion, that we can put our faith into more than words, more than vague hopes and fine committees. Help your church bear worthy fruit.

And we pray for our community; for a widespread opening of ears and hearts to each other, that we can get beyond our complacency and beyond the polarities of placards to a better depth of understanding, a greater tolerance and deeper respect born of the one who came to bring peace.

For our leaders, give wisdom
and restrict the supply chain of venom.
Quieten the cries of division,
silence the voices of prejudice and hate.
Enable innovations that heal,
empower those who bring us together
and encourage whatever helps to bring reconciliation.

We pray for the people around us;
those who bear a hard burden or pain;
- we name them to you: ...
hear and use our prayers,
so your will may be done here, as it is in heaven.

Loving God, our prayers continue on.
We ask and listen and act through Jesus,
who gave us these words to pray together:



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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

Act For Peace - Christmas Bowl 2021

<https://christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au/>

In the Christmas story we see God choosing to become our neighbour by taking on human flesh. This is an act of love from God that draws us into the story of God's love for all creation and invites us to be witnesses to God's love through our loving action in the world.

The Christmas Bowl provides us with a practical way to show love for our neighbours most in need. Your gift to the Christmas Bowl will remind our neighbours around the world that they are not forgotten, that they are loved and that we are all part of God's love. As we celebrate Christmas, may our love for our neighbour grow.

Rev. Sharon Hollis,
President, Uniting Church in Australia

Singing: Let earth and heaven - TIS 305

Let earth and heaven combine,
their voices all agree,
to praise in songs divine
the incarnate deity,
our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man.

Unsearchable the love
that has the saviour brought;
the grace is far above
our own or angel's thought:
enough for us that God, we know,
our God, is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear,
widest extremes to join;
and bring our vileness near
and make us all divine:
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love,
and sanctified by grace,
we ashall from earth remove,
and see his glorious face;
then shall his love be fully showed,
and we shall then be lost in God.

words: Charles Wesley 1070-88 alt
music: 'The Parish Choir' 1851
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Blessing

The Celebration need not cease.

***It can echo in our lives,
in our words and in our deeds,
and in our dreams.***

*Carry wonder and celebration
with you wherever you go.*

***Let us be a blessing to others
wherever we find ourselves.***

*May the God you see
in all the colours of creation
bless you with a sense of awe,
expectation and wonder.*

***May the love and grace of God
be a strong presence with us***

*May the God who is a source of inspiration
and courage, keep calling you forward.*

***May God go with and us bless us;
And be our hope, our guide and our peace
Yes, Amen.***

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