



Sunday Dec 26th, 2021 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Gathering & Lighting the Candle

After all this waiting,
all this wondering,
all this watching,
Love has broken into the world anew.

Our world breathes a sigh of relief
as the parties are over and
we tuck into leftovers.

The pace of things changes
as some sleep on the couch
while watching cricket or yachts racing.

Many are travelling,
lighting barbecues,
or sunning and swimming.

Do we remember that
love has broken into the world?

We light a candle, the Christ candle,
to recall that in Jesus
the most radical inbreaking
presence of God lights our way.

Call to worship (Ps 148)

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the
heavens; praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you
shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters
above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he
commanded and they were created.

Let us worship God.

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 - Joy to the world TiS 268

words: Isaac Watts 1674-1748 alt music: W. Holford c. 1834

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.

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Prayer

God with us, Emmanuel,
We wonder at your love for us.
Even though we as church seek to prepare
for your inbreaking love
through the season of Advent,
the world seems to conspire
with commitments, distractions and demands.



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If today has us slowing down a little,
then perhaps it calls us to remember again,
to renew our wonder in the birth of Jesus.

How can it be that you,
creator of all,
comes to us in such a
tiny and vulnerable way?

We pause again to wonder...

In our wonder we remember that
we are God's chosen ones,
and with that we are to clothe ourselves
with compassion, kindness, humility,
meekness and patience.

But we struggle to walk this way
even in basic and simple things.

Christmas brings its stresses and strains -
expectations, demands, difficult relationships.
We know we fall short of compassion, kindness,
humility, meekness and patience and
this time of year tests us like no other.

Hear our struggles as we pause again...

And we wonder at love that comes to us
through a boy born to Mary and Joseph,
one who changes our world,
one who changes the world.

In him we are chosen by God, we are loved, we
are restored. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Listening

Read: Colossians 3:12-17 &
Luke 2:41-52

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

Reflecting - Rev. Barbara Strickland

At the heart of the Christmas story is the message
that God is with us. *Emmanuel*, a Hebrew name
meaning God with us, reflects the joyous promise
to all who approach in wonder and longing, that
the longed-for Messiah is a God who is not
distant, but accessible; not remote, but longing to
be connected to human beings in love. The baby
born to Mary and Joseph is the sign of hope and a
new future.

Each of the four Gospels spells out what it means
that Jesus came to be with us, yet we have large
gaps which from our human perspective we
would like to see filled-in. We know little about
Jesus' upbringing, about his formation, his place
in his family life. The focus of the Gospel
accounts is to point to what it means that God
wants to be in relationship with us and how we
are to be disciples in the Kingdom of God.

Luke, of all the Gospel writers, is the only one to
tell today's story of the 12 year-old Jesus. A very
human story. Don't we wish we had more stories
like this? Luke seems to think it is important to
include this story of the young Jesus, just at the
cusp of adolescence and growing maturity. It
emphasises for all, that Almighty God, did indeed
come among us and become human. Our God is
inextricably bound to us, part of our life and our
world.

The crowd of pilgrims were returning home from
the Passover festival. Mary and Joseph, and
Jesus, would have been travelling together with
friends and family, talking, singing, eating,
laughing, enjoying time on the journey. His
parents hadn't immediately noticed that Jesus
was not with them, but that was hardly
surprising. They probably assumed, with the
mesh of people, that Jesus was with friends or
relatives. They had often travelled with others
from Nazareth to Jerusalem, and Jesus would
likely have known many in the group.

But now, where is he? Jesus could not be found!
We can all relate to the unfolding anxiety and
concern. This is every parent's worst nightmare!

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Mary and Joseph trekked back to Jerusalem, and eventually found Jesus in the temple listening to the teachers and asking questions.

Was Jesus being rebellious and trying to cause trouble for his parents? Probably not. But he had a longing to spend time in the temple. God speaks to souls at any age and Jesus, at this pivotal age, experienced a deep call to seek out and explore significant things with the religious leaders, the ones who were regarded as the bearers of wisdom. Do we attend to our soul longings?

This picture of a genuinely human Jesus in a genuinely human context is the same Jesus who will become the Saviour and liberator of all. We are left in no doubt that our God and Saviour experienced every aspect of being truly human and knows what we go through. Our God longs to fill our souls with hope, identity and purpose.

One approach to engaging with this story is put aside our analytical minds and listen deeply as we immerse ourselves in the story of the first Christmas and later on. Here, can we put ourselves in the place of Mary and Joseph? Can we make the story our own? Can we relive the story and experience the good news? Can we hear the words of angels, shepherds, and the 12 year-old Jesus, as speaking to us? Can we let our imaginations bring to life the sights, the sounds, the wonder and the love of the Good News? Can we, like Mary, find things to treasure in our hearts?

As we do so, may we be both blessed and be a blessing. Amen.

Responding: **Prayers for World & Community**

God of wonder, God of love,
we are aware of the things we enjoy
and often take for granted -
gathering as family and community,
feasting at tables of abundance,
the capacity to enjoy a holiday.

We pray for all who struggle to find basic necessities like food, shelter and community.

We give thanks for those who have offered food, connection and shelter over the Christmas period - those who have invited strangers to the Christmas dinner; those who have offered a bed to those without one; for those who have sought ways to ease housing shortages in many places.

We pray for places ravaged by tornadoes in the USA recently. We recall the impact of volcanoes in Spain and Indonesia. We pray for places across the world where needed vaccines for COVID-19 are not available.

We pray for families isolated through border closures, across the world and across states of Australia. We recall the joy some have experienced recently as borders have opened in time for Christmas.

We pray for our political leaders who make decisions about borders, about health and many things that have impacted many people in challenging ways.

We reflect on the work of government supporting agencies to make a positive difference. In particular we pray for the work of the *Homeless to Housing* initiative. Through this initiative we have partnerships between local Uniting churches and *Uniting Vic-Tas* to assist those without a place to call home.

We pray for travelling safety as many people take a break after a year that has been very difficult.

We offer prayers for people and situations upon our hearts ...

In and through all places of challenge, may the light of Christ continue to shine in our world.



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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

God with us,
may these gifts we offer in your name
be part of revealing your inbreaking love
to our world.
May these offerings be sign that we
offer the whole of who we are
as followers of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Singing - Let all creation dance (TiS 187)

Let all creation dance
in energies sublime,
as order turns with chance,
unfolding space and time,
for nature's art
in glory grows,
and newly shows
God's mind and heart.

God's breath each force unfurls,
igniting from a spark
expanding starry swirls,
with whirlpools dense and dark.
Though moon and sun
seem mindless things,
each orbit sings:
'Your will be done.'

Our own amazing earth,
with sunlight, cloud and storms
and life's abundant growth
in lovely shapes and forms,
is made for praise,
a fragile whole,
and from its soul
heaven's music plays.

Lift heart and soul and voice:
in Christ all praises meet
and nature shall rejoice
as all is made complete.
In hope be strong.
all life befriend
and kindly tend
creation's song.

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Blessing

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

Together in Song 779
W: Aubrey Podlich; M: Robin Mann
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