



Advent 4 - Sunday December 18th, 2022 The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Give ear O Shepherd of Israel,
you who led Joseph like a flock.
Stir up your might and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;
let your face shine,
that we may be saved. (*Ps 80 adapted*)

We light a candle to acknowledge that the light of Christ shines among 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 - O come Emmanuel TIS 265

OR The King of glory comes - TIS 279

OR Come thou long expected Jesus - TIS 272



Prayer

ADVENT WREATH

On this fourth Sunday in Advent – the time when we prepare once again for Jesus coming.

We light these candles to remind us that Jesus brings light into the dark places of the world.

Through the prophets, God promised a future shaped by justice and righteousness.

We share this hope as we wait for the fulfilment of God's promise in Jesus, light of the world.

A purple candle is lit

Singing - Come, let's walk

based on Isaiah 2:5

words: Jennie Gordon © 2019

tune: Twinkle, twinkle, little star

**Come, let's walk the path of light
through the darkness of the night.
Now the lost don't walk alone,
hungry ones are welcomed home.
Love in what we do and say,
love between us on the way.**

God enfleshed amongst us,
we hear through the prophets
and in the psalms that you keep
reaching out to call us back.

We give you thanks
for the way you shepherded Israel.
We offer our praise
for all the ways you restore us,
for your face that shines upon us.

But like the ancients we struggle
to stay the journey.
We say we will never turn back from you
but we get tired,
we are distractible,
we are tempted in the
wilderness of our own making,
we desire more than you seem to offer.

Forgive our struggles
to stay the journey.
Remind us again of your paths,
until we find our way with you.

We remember your light
shines among us.
We hear again the Advent of
your in-breaking love.

In the name of Emmanuel,
God with us,
we are renewed and restored
as pilgrims on the way.
Thanks be to God. Amen.



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Passing the peace

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

Listening

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!

**You who are enthroned upon the cherubim,
shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and
Manasseh.**

Stir up your might, and come to save us!

**Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you
be angry with your people's prayers?

**You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.**

You make us the scorn of our neighbours;
our enemies laugh among themselves.

**Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

Read: *Isaiah 7:10-16 & Matthew 1:18-25*

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

Reflecting - Rev. Gospel Ralte

GOD WITH US

Introduction:

The son of God, the human Jesus, the divine Christ became vulnerable to live amongst us in our vulnerable humanity. This imparts strength and richness to us, as the vulnerability of heaven and earth join together, and a strong relationship is built. Jesus Christ chose to become a vulnerable person so that the vulnerable world will be able to understand him and accept his love for them.

God with us in peace making and intervention:

In this story from Matthew's gospel, the way Jesus was conceived nearly caused his earthly parent's separation or divorce. When the divine work in the world is not understood from the point of God's love and care for humankind, it is always misunderstood. When the angel of God informed Joseph about the birth of Jesus, Joseph took the matter into his own hands, directed by his personal feelings and tried to leave his pregnant wife (betrothed woman) quietly, because he did not want to disgrace her publicly.

At first, the divine vulnerability of Christ, the chosen way of God to become human was not fully explained to Joseph. Joseph might have recalled Isaiah's prophecy regarding the virgin birth. It seemed that Joseph, like other Pharisees in those times, anticipated that the Messiah would be born in a royal family; though being from a royal Davidic line, Joseph may not have considered his family to be an eligible or even possible channel for the birth of Christ.

There is a human tendency to exclude oneself from being God's chosen instrument to channel the love and care of God to the world. Sometimes we can only see it by looking back. The way of God's dealing with humankind is known or seen in the life of the faithful who have gone before us. Without telling the details of the plan, God may just give us a hint that something is going to happen through us, which could well be misunderstood. The birth of Jesus is part of the story of God's indwelling presence among human beings in the most visible and tangible way. God comes to us in God's own time and in God's own gentle way. Faith is knowing that God is present and active in the world, through us and despite us.

Back to the story from Matthew's gospel. How stressed Joseph would have been after learning about Mary's pregnancy. In that situation, a minute could have been equalled to an eternity! No complaint, no argument or no clarification about Mary's pregnancy. He alone suffered, did



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not want to hurt Mary. If Joseph could have opened his heart to Mary, Mary could have explained her experience to him in detail. Maybe Mary could have thought that the messenger of the Lord who brought her that news might have also informed Joseph. Open conversion is important to set us free from unwanted stress and unhealthy thinking about ourselves and others. But God knows Joseph's mental suffering and what he is thinking about. So, God intervenes immediately and solves Joseph's dilemma. Joseph follows God's will with confidence and an ease of mind.

God with us in reconciliation and saving:

This child, Emmanuel, God with us, is the saviour of the whole world, reconciling the world and bearing the love which has fully enveloped the entire universe. In today's reading, Joseph includes his family in the channel of God's reconciling work to the world.

How do we plan to incarnate "God with us" in our family, church and community?

"Restore us, O God Almighty, make your face shine upon us that we may be saved." (Ps 80:7)

Singing -There's a light upon the mountains - TiS 276

OR The people who in darkness walked - TiS 274

Offering

God who breaks into our world,
taking on flesh to live among us,
bless these things we offer to your service.
Join them and us to the welfare of all,
especially those most in need
of the life and hope you offer.

Notices

December 23rd is the anniversary of the Wik Native Title Decision in 1996.

Responding:

Prayers for World & Community

Radical in-breaking God,
through the prophet Isaiah
we hear a sign of hope:
*Look, the young woman is with child
and shall bear a son,
and shall name him Immanuel. (Is 7:14)*

We remember that Immanuel means
God is with us.

So we pray for the world and our community,
for places where of longing and need,
for troubled places and people to perceive
that God is indeed with us.

We wonder with Europe and other places
impacted by power and gas shortages -
how they will survive the deep cold of Christmas
and winter. We pray for all who face unbearable
cold, for those displaced through war, for those
rendered homeless, for those deep in grief.

We pray for people in the Ukraine, that hope may
be found through love and compassion of
neighbours nearby and far away. May the Christ
child bring renewed hope to all places of war and
conflict. Other parts of the world face the threat
of terrorist activity, civil war, political unrest,
ethnic violence and drug wars.

As the words from Isaiah remind us, the child
who brings hope will refuse evil and choose the
good. May this become reality for places where
evil seems to triumph.

We pray for those in our community who struggle
to find housing through the current mortgage and
rental crises. We remember those who have been
hit by floods and live in unsafe places through
water damage.

We pray for all who dread Christmas because it
comes laden with grief, guilt or fear. May there be
light that breaks into situations that are dark.



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May hope be found in the deep and radical mystery of God's in-breaking into our world.

We pray for the church, that we may claim anew the bold story of hope born among us. We recall it is folk on the edges who were first to witness and belong to the story of Emmanuel, God with us. May we as church remember that our call is outwards, to the margins, to love and welcome people as Jesus does.

As we celebrate light that breaks into our world, we pray as Jesus taught us:

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.

Singing - Behold a rose is growing TiS 294

OR Long ago, prophets knew - TiS 283

Blessing

"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 son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
(from Matthew 1:20-21)

We are sent out from this time together
to wonder at what God does,
to be moved by God's love,
to marvel at the breaking of God
into our lived places -
to save us from our sins.

Go to bear hope and light
in your lived places.
Go and be blessed
in the name of our in-breaking God:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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