



## **Christmas Eve, 2022**

### **The Fig Tree Worship Resource**

#### **Call to worship & Lighting the Candles**

This is the time for candles,  
and for carols,  
and for welcoming each other with joy.  
All of us, wonderers and wanderers  
are here to meet  
the One who comes to us.  
**May it be so, Amen.**

*Light as many candles as you can!*

#### **Acknowledging**



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress*

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 all ye faithful TiS 304**

**You might choose to sing only verses 1,2,3, 5 & 6**



#### **Prayer**

The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned. *Isaiah 9:2*

Thank you God  
for coming to us, vulnerable and messy,  
and showing us love  
and bringing us hope  
and startling us with glory.

**Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace,  
goodwill among people.**

Thankyou for reaching out to us  
and teaching us how to live with kindness,  
and with open hearts and healing hands.

**Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace,  
goodwill among people.**

Thank you, that you love us,  
no matter where we've been, or who we are  
or what we've done, or not done.  
Your great embrace includes us all!

**Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace,  
goodwill among people.**

In the quiet, we bring to you  
the things that sit heavy on our hearts.  
Forgive us, and help us to accept your peace  
and your gift of release.

(time of quiet)

Sisters and brothers  
know this, that God's love is bigger  
than anything we can imagine.  
This love was born, fragile and foreign  
to a world that wasn't ready  
and may never be.

But here and now, this love can bring peace.  
We are forgiven, set free:

The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned. *Isaiah 9:2*

**Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace,  
goodwill among people.**

#### **Passing the peace**

May the Prince of Peace dwell with you:  
**and also with you.**



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#### **Listening**

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Read: Isaiah 9: 2 - 7

Luke 2: 1 – 14

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:

**Thanks be to God.**

#### **Reflecting - Rev. Ian Brown**

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*“Peace on Earth, a messy experience”*

I wonder who remembers the Christmas of 1999? Christmas was overshadowed that year by the millennium, the fears of a Y2k bug and probably much else as well. I wonder, do you remember what you were given or gave five years ago or last Christmas? I wonder, if you were in church, do you remember what carols you sang or what was the theme? Not many of us will remember any of those details. I don't!

The sort of giving I remember has to do with the joy on a child's face when our son got his first bike and his sister, her first trike. If I asked instead, who you loved in those years or who was with you, it might be a different matter for remembering. It's the people, the love, the relationships that stay with us. Maybe that's all we really have to give, all we really want to receive. And that's the heart of this whole Christmas story about what God gives. Not this thing or that. Not an idea, God gives God's own self at Christmas. And it's something God seems to approach, not with pomp and grandeur, but more with a sense of humour and humility.

I think perhaps Luke had some of this humour in mind when he wrote about the expectant travelling couple, caught out at the end of their journey, about the manger, the shepherds and the angels. The messy experience of being a long way from home, giving birth in the shed out the back, certainly nowhere near a palace – would have stretched even the best sense of humour.

But we are inclined to ignore the good humour and general drift of the story and get caught up with questions. How could these things happen? Where is the promised 'peace on earth'? What is the evidence and so on. The Bible doesn't specify

dates. No birth certificate has come down to us. Even the Romans – meticulous record keepers otherwise – made no mention of a Jewish census that might pinpoint the time of Jesus' birth. The important thing that's marked though, is the relationships and the turning points in them.

The parents, the lineage is sketched, but the story isn't straightforward. The Nativity stories came to be associated with the turn of the year – winter equinox in the northern hemisphere, when the slide towards darkness reverses, when days start getting brighter and warmer again. The bible story, in a similar way, focuses on turning points in our lives. The major turning point here marks the arrival of Immanuel; God with us. God gives us a turning point, where we meet Jesus, 'God with us' humble, in a stable, a new baby, a new family, new relationships. 'God with us' points us toward changes of direction and different values.

God is no longer distant and completely other, here God is small, weak and personal. Here God is not totally beyond us, but sleeping in straw, then walking the dirt roads and blessing the poor and the ill with new life. This is the arrival of what the angels proclaim, 'Peace on earth, good will to all' - it is good news, but the way it works out is a messy business!

So, as we celebrate with story and with song, with music and warm greetings, as we feast with joy, maybe exchange a present or two, as we lift up our prayers, we do it because this is not a time for bare words, concepts and theories. It's a time for love made real, a time for celebration with all that we have and are. This is a truth that must be embodied; God gives God's own self at Christmas. It's a truth that continues in us.

Here, we join in God's joy, and it should always be a generous, open, sharing thing because the birth of Christ was that too.

What we celebrate here is a Gospel wide open to us, to all who are less than perfect. The light of the world shines, not in the things or the traditions of the season, but in being with us; human and flawed as we are.

*The Fig Tree Worship Resource comes to you from the Presbytery of Gippsland, Uniting Church in Australia with blessings and permission to use the content in worship services with acknowledgement.*



## Christmas Eve, 2022

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This is the hope of Christmas; that this grace, this accepting embrace of God-with-us, is for everyone.

And perhaps as we take a moment here, something of the amazing wonder of this babe who is God-with-us, of the light of the season might come together for us with a new clarity. And if we have no room left for wonder, then may God help us find a small space somewhere for a new beginning! This is good news!

### **Singing - Infant holy, TiS 292**

#### **Offering**

*You may choose to have a bowl at the door and invite people to contribute to the Christmas Bowl Appeal, through Act for Peace.*

“The Christmas Bowl ... offers the hope of human solidarity and witnesses to the hope we have in the way of Jesus, whose birth brings hope to our world, not as one apart from the world but as God fully engaged with the world. I encourage you to support the Christmas Bowl as an act of hopeful solidarity.”

**Rev. Sharon Hollis,**

**President, Uniting Church in Australia**

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

#### **Responding:**

#### **Prayers for World & Community**

*Have a tray of sand and some taper candles for people to place around a central candle. Play a carol, or some reflective music. Allow time ...*

You are invited to come and light a candle:  
in remembrance,  
in gratitude,  
in hope, for peace.

You may wish to say something aloud;  
a name, a place, a situation.  
Please remember to respect  
the confidentiality and privacy of others.

Come and offer your prayers  
and at the end  
I invite you to pray the Lord's Prayer together  
in the language of your heart.

*When people have finished, lead into ...*

#### **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 - Silent night TiS 311**

#### **Blessing**

Go in peace, knowing that now and always  
love will be born, strange and surprising,  
vulnerable and powerful,  
breathtaking, like stars in the night sky,  
mesmerising, like a campfire,  
welcoming, like a feasting table.

May the child we celebrate now,  
be born in you, and visible in many ways,  
through all your days.

#### **May it be so, Amen!**

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