



## **Christmas Day, 2022**

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

#### **Singing O come all ye faithful TiS 304**

You might choose to sing only verses 1 & 7

#### **Call to worship**

Go through, go through the gates,  
prepare the way for the people; *Isaiah 62: 10*

We prepare a way for you to come to us,  
child in a manger, God-with-us.

**Leaving behind all the waiting and preparation  
all the crazy days leading up to this one,  
we come.**

Wide-eyed with wonder, tired and trembling,  
**unsure of our place, messy with life,  
we come, and you meet us here.**

May your Spirit rest on this gathering,  
letting your light, hope, peace and love  
be born in us, reside in us,  
and be known through us,

**May it be so, Amen.**

#### **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 - Angels from the realms TiS 309**

or Hark the Herald Angels Sing TiS 303

#### **Prayer**



*Lighting of the Advent Wreath*  
*All candles are lit*

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Into our world, our space, our time:

**Christ is born**

**Into our darkness, our yearning, our need:**

**Light comes, bringing hope.**

**Into our reality, our living and our questions  
comes the flesh and blood of Jesus.**

**Glory to God in the highest heaven!**

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.



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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:

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

#### ***Passing the peace***

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

#### ***Listening***

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Read: Isaiah 62: 6 – 12  
Luke 2: 8 – 20

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

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

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**"BABY CELEBRATIONS"**

Lots of us like to sing at Christmas. Carols are a good way to celebrate – even if it is still through a mask! The Bible is full of times when people sing to God. On the beach of the Red Sea, feet still wet, Miriam and the women sang. In tormented nights in the palace, David sang the demons out of Saul. And throughout his life David sang praises and the promises of God.

But now, here at this point and only here, on this first Christmas night, the entire heavenly host sing to a few people, not just any people, but shepherds, who were not thinking about God at all, until the angels came. This singing marks a great celebration!

Luke wrote about an expectant travelling couple, caught out at the end of a journey they were forced to take by the occupying power. He wrote in understated terms about a stressed family away from home, about poor circumstances, the shed and the manger. The shepherds fit the tone

too and then, surprise! There are angels singing and a heavenly proclamation. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace.."

It's attractive, the glory to God and the peace, but that's the hard part for us. 'And on earth, peace'. God may have this intent, the Christmas cards might proclaim it, even our genuine best wishes want this. But our world does its best to contradict it.

There's no room in the inn, the Romans are pushing people around, the security threat level is being raised, the news is full of tragedies and violence, as it ever was. And we have this message from the heavens, of peace.

Unwrapping is something of a familiar experience for most of us at Christmas. So perhaps a little unwrapping of this story. We learn the message is delivered by the angelos, we translate it, 'angels', but it's just the Greek for messenger. They are said to come from God and tell of God's coming. 'Immanuel' is the message here, in a nutshell. It's Hebrew for "God with us." How is God with us? That's where we stop unwrapping and deal with mystery. God is "the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity," says the prophet Isaiah, and by and large, though they would use different language and symbols to express it, all the major faiths of the world would tend to agree. And yet in our story today, we meet 'God with us', laid in a manger.

This Jesus is the one who, from his arrival in a manger to his departure on a cross, redefines God for us. Here God is no longer distant and completely other, here God is small, vulnerable and personal. Here God is not totally transcendent, but is sleeping in straw, walking the streets and blessing the poor. This is how peace comes on earth. It arrives in person and helps us break down the walls between us, not calling us to take up a fight, not needing us to engage in conflict. This 'God with us' arrives to quell fear, to take on the risk, stands up to the threat of violence and takes the consequences.

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So as we celebrate, remember this is a time for love and adoration, a time for embodied truth, lived with generous self-giving and extravagant love.

Here, in celebration we join in God's joy. Here we reflect God's love made flesh, made real in human action. And, as it was from the outset, it should always be a generous open sharing thing, because the birth of Christ and his peace was for all.

This is a message open to all who are less than perfect. The light of the world does shine in the darkest places, despite the walls, the temptation to hate the other and human policies of separation. In this joyful good news, we are all embraced by God.

And perhaps as we take a moment here to take in a little of the scope of Christmas meaning, something of the incredible wonder of this baby who is God-with-us, something of the wonder of the season might be lit with a new spark for us. And that might give us some inspiration to join in doing what we can for this peace to grow!

#### **Singing - Away in a manger TiS 318**

*The following re-write can be used with blessing, permission and acknowledgement - vv 2-5, Jennie Gordon © 2016*

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;  
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

An innocent stranger, this boy-child so near  
brings blessing to those who are living in fear  
brings hope to the weary and love's burning light  
to all who are lost or afraid in the night.

From here at the manger, we ask you to stay  
close by us as we try to walk in your way;  
confronting the powers and growing in grace  
as those who most need you, come bearing your face.

Let us who have plenty, give those who have less;  
an offer of shelter, a friendship to bless,  
asylum for refugees, food for the poor,  
shared tables of comfort and wide open doors.

From manger to marketplace, Jesus come near

and whisper your wonder to our waiting ears.  
Bring healing and freedom, bring hope and release  
so all of creation can breathe in your peace.

#### **Offering**

*You may choose to 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*

**Receiving grace, we are thankful.  
Appreciating beauty, we wonder.  
In our giving, we celebrate.  
May the gifts of your provision to us,  
Return as signs of your love to bless others.**

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

#### **Responding: Prayers for World & Community**

**As a response we will sing verses of this  
hymn throughout the prayer -  
Singing in prayer:  
O little town of Bethlehem TiS 316**

God-with-us,  
Child in a manger, Jesus the Christ,  
you came close to us,  
so that we might know life, in all of its fullness.

We pray for people who struggle with life  
and with all that today brings.  
Those who are lonely or displaced,  
who carry the acute pain of loved ones lost,  
who don't have a seat at a table of welcome  
or can find little to cause to celebrate.

#### **O little town of Bethlehem - verse 1**

We pray for people in places of conflict

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where today is another day to seek shelter  
and to wonder at what the future might hold  
or if they will see tomorrow.

We pray for leaders of the world  
that they might work for universal peace  
and not personal power.

#### **O little town of Bethlehem - verse 2**

We pray for our disrupted world,  
communities and creatures,  
ecosystems and habitats  
struggling with climate change,  
facing eviction and extinction.  
We give thanks for people finding new ways  
to grow food, harness energy and live lightly.

#### **O little town of Bethlehem - verse 3**

We pray for the church  
faithful, traditional, fresh and emerging,  
sometimes fumbling to find meaning  
or stumbling over old blocks,  
but persistently and patiently reaching out  
offering open hands and hearts,  
in the adventure of these changing times.

#### **O little town of Bethlehem - verse 4**

as we pray together the words that Jesus taught  
us, in the language of your heart:

#### **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 - Joy to the world TiS 268**

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#### **Blessing**

*from Luke 8:10-14*

But the angel said to them,  
**'Do not be afraid; for see—  
I am bringing you good news  
of great joy for ALL the people:**

to you is born this day in the city of David  
a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.  
This will be a sign for you:  
you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth  
and lying in a manger.'  
And suddenly there was with the angel  
a multitude of the heavenly host,  
praising God and saying,  
**'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace, goodwill among people.**

We go knowing that we are loved by our God,  
who has come close, as close as our breathing.

May the Spirit rest on us as we leave,  
letting the light, hope, peace and love  
be born in us, reside in us,  
and be known through us,

**May it be so, Amen.**

#### **Singing - May the feet of God TiS 779**

*Advent candle liturgy and Reflection:  
Rev. Ian Brown  
Wattlebird Ministry Team - Warragul*

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