

**Whitehorse Uniting Church**  
**Sunday 3 December 2023 at Mitcham**  
**Advent 1 B**



**Narges Daneshmand - Baptism and Confirmation**



**Hymn 418 She sits like a bird.**

**St Chad. Ladybarn 2020**

<https://youtu.be/9iYgOWT1AKA?si=weY7ii7xTFpvjhuc>

**Welcome**

May you be blessed.

**Call to Worship**

The Lord our God calls us to:

**Love the Lord with all our heart and mind and soul.**

The Lord our God calls us to:

**Love our neighbour as ourselves.**

**Prayer of invocation**

Come Holy Spirit Come

**Midwife of new churches and ministries**

Come Holy Spirit Come

**Empower us to be the hands and feet of Jesus.**

**Prayer of Confession (From Synod, adapted)**

Let us spend a moment in silence to reckon,  
 with the things that aren't sitting right with us.

*Silence*

Brothers and sisters in Christ

Hear the good news.

God is with us.

We are forgiven.

We are being made new.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Advent Wreath – Hope**

Leader: As we light our first Advent Candle

*Lights candle*

**Congregation:**

**We open ourselves up to your hope in our lives,  
 We light the advent candle and remind ourselves,  
 of the ways you have provided for us,  
 and we live in the hope that you will  
 use us this advent to bring hope to those in need.**

**Song: This Little Light of mine**  
**Wesley's Wuppets – 2019 (10 million views)**  
<https://youtu.be/NsbRlg-ebWg?si=gwz3BsINyJdCiIT->

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine  
 This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine  
 This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine  
 Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

## Readings

### 1 John 4:7-19

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup>We love<sup>[a]</sup> because he first loved us.

### Mark 13:24-37

<sup>24</sup>"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup>and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup>"Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>Then he will send out the angels and gather the<sup>[a]</sup> elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. <sup>28</sup>"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he<sup>[b]</sup> is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. <sup>32</sup>"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Beware, keep alert,<sup>[c]</sup> for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore, keep awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or at dawn, <sup>36</sup>or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

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**Reflection – Rev Tina - Open the door to Christ this advent.**  
*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.*

Some of you may have seen the famous painting of Christ at the door by William Holman Hunt. It hangs inside St Paul's London. There is no handle on the outside of the door. There is a story about a child asking questions: Why won't they let Christ in? Why don't they open the door? Later, after much pondering, the child says: They're probably in the basement and can't hear him. It's a long way away.

Perhaps it takes a long time for us to hear his voice because we are somewhere else or it's not the right time for us to hear him. Perhaps some of us need to take an around the world trip and come back to the place where we began before we can hear him or respond to his call.

Perhaps it's a bit like transition, that time after the beginning and before reaching the destination. Yet, transitions can be places where growth takes place so we can reach the place God is taking us and see it with new eyes for the first time and understand.

Our church is on a journey, and we are in transition. We have made a great beginning in becoming one church and one day, when we are ready, we will reach the destination that God has planned for us. Never doubt it.

Today, we are embracing several firsts, as a new church. Our first new church year. Our first advent and Christmas. Our first baptism and confirmation. Transitions can be like nothing, nothing, nothing happening and then suddenly a speedy event comes upon us, and we reach the place we set out for, we reach our destination.

Today's gospel is about a moment in history where the early church faced war, a siege, starvation, destruction and suffering, mass crucifixions by the invading Romans and many deaths and the destruction of the Temple, of their world as they knew it. There are parallels today, in the Middle East.

The gospel calls for Christians to stand firm in their faith. To keep awake. To stay alert. To trust God. To stay strong, for they are doorkeepers of the Lord's house while he is away. That's us. We are doorkeepers of the Lord's house, while he is away.

Pray for Christians in the West Bank, caught in the middle of a siege, war, starvation, death and destruction and suffering. Pray for us as we stand firm in our faith. We are doorkeepers (not gatekeepers) of the Lord's house, the church, and we are called to bring new life and hope to others.

So how do we maintain and nurture our faith during challenging times?



We pray, like the seamstress in this painting. Outside her window looks bleak and her life seems hard, yet she meets with God in her prayers and finds life and hope for the journey. She finds strength and beauty in God.



When we pray the Spirit comes upon us filling our hearts with love, drawing us closer to God where we abide in God and God abides in us. God is love. When we have love in us, we have God in us and when we have God in us, we have love in us. We love others as we are loved by God, who first loved us. We find our strength in God as we face transitions, changes, and new beginnings together.

So, this advent, ask yourself some questions:

What are you opening the door for, Lord?

Is the door already open?

What are the barriers to opening the door?

What's stopping me from walking through the door?

You may have your own question or perhaps you're not ready.



God has opened a door for Narges and she has walked through it. Narges means daffodil. That lovely bright shining yellow flower of hope that comes at springtime. We need to be ready to walk with Narges and offer her love and support as she grows in her faith, understanding and love for God in Jesus. Narges has received love from us, and we have received love from her. She has prepared her heart for today and chosen readings that speak of love, and you will hear more from Narges when she speaks of her faith journey and affirms her faith.

So, are you ready?

If you haven't been baptised or confirmed, is God calling you and speaking into your heart to be baptised or confirmed? Is God calling you to walk through the door? Contact me if God is calling you and we can arrange for your baptism or confirmation or both.

This advent, ponder on what door the Lord is calling you to enter? What door the Lord is opening for you.

The hymn: *O little town of Bethlehem*, was written long before a large wall was built around the church in Bethlehem that stands on top of the cave Jesus is said to have been born. There are beautiful words in the hymn of a light in the darkness where hope meets fear and angels keep their watch of wondering love.



Leunig, used with permission.

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see you lie!  
Above your deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:  
**yet, in your dark streets shining  
the everlasting light,  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in you tonight.***

*For Christ is born of Mary; and, gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep **the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love.**  
O morning stars, together  
proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the King  
and peace to all on earth.*



This is the door of a 12<sup>th</sup> century chapel on Iona, an island in Scotland. It's called St Oran's. If you look through the door and into the darkness, you can see light, shining on a metal cross. Perhaps the light invites you to enter the chapel where kings and Saints are buried, kings such as McBeth and a nun. We adore our sacred places. Yet being a doorkeeper of God's house is not about buildings. It's about the church, the community of God, the Body of Christ, the house where God's spirit and love abides.

Will you walk into God's house this advent and draw close to God? Advent is about transformation and preparation. It's about staying awake. It's not about sleeping and neglecting our soul's welfare. Advent is about remembering how God is with us, waiting patiently for our response. Will you embrace God this advent and open your heart to God's love? Will you prepare your heart for the birth of Jesus into your life?

### **Baptism Hymn 492 Take this water and please bless it, Lord.**

1. Take this water and please bless it, Lord,  
take this water and please bless it, Lord;  
flowing gently on *her* head,  
symbol that you once were dead  
but live again.

*Refrain: Celebrate the dying unto sin,  
rising up, a new life to begin,  
cleansed and purified before the Lord,  
God's child now, no longer on your own;  
now the Holy Spirit in you sown,  
seeds of truth to spread abroad.*

2. Take this person and please bless *her*, Lord,  
take this person and please bless *her*, Lord;  
help *her* grow into the one  
image of your holy Son,  
in likeness.

*Refrain: Celebrate the dying unto sin, ....*

3. Take this people and please bless us, Lord,  
take this people and please bless us, Lord;  
make our witness strong and true,  
always faithful unto you,  
our Father.

*Refrain: Celebrate the dying unto sin, .....*

*Ellaine Downie 1952 -*

## Baptism and Confirmation of Narges Daneshmand



### Presentation of Narges by Church Council chair Julie Hawkey

Julie brings forward Narges Danesh and says to the congregation:

Friends, the church council of this congregation has received a request for baptism from Narges Danesh.

This important decision has been prayerfully and carefully considered, and I am glad to welcome her here today.

*The minister says to the candidate:*

Narges, what do you ask of God's Church?

**I ask to be baptised into the faith and family of Jesus Christ.**

Narges has been called by the Holy Spirit to claim the faith of Jesus Christ as her own and, through baptism, to die to sin and rise to newness of life through a new birth by water and the Spirit.

*The minister may touch the person's ears and mouth, saying:*

Narges, may the Lord open your ears to hear his word, and your mouth to proclaim his praise.

### Scripture Narges has chosen.

#### John 3:5-7

<sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup>What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You<sup>[a]</sup> must be born from above.'<sup>[b]</sup>

#### John 8:12

Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

### The meaning of Baptism – Daniel Jackson, Narges' sponsor

Baptism is Christ's gift.

It is the sign by which the Spirit of God joins people to Jesus Christ and incorporates them into his body, the Church.

In his own baptism in the Jordan by John, Jesus identified himself with humanity in its brokenness and sin; that baptism was completed in his death and resurrection.

By God's grace, baptism plunges us into the faith of Jesus Christ, so that whatever is his may be called ours. By water and the Spirit we are claimed as God's own and set free from the power of sin and death.

Thus, claimed by God we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit that we may live as witnesses to Jesus Christ, share his ministry in the world and grow to maturity, awaiting with hope the day of our Lord Jesus.

## The Confession of Faith

*The minister says:*

In baptism, we are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light. In response to the gospel, I ask you: Narges, do you repent of your sins? **I repent of my sins.**

Narges, do you turn to Jesus Christ who has defeated the power of sin and death and brought us new life? **I turn to Christ.**

Narges, do you commit yourself to God, trusting in Jesus Christ as Saviour and in the Holy Spirit as God's power and presence along the way? **I commit myself to God.**

*The minister says to the congregation*

In unity with the whole Church, let us stand and affirm the faith into which we were baptised. ***The people stand.***

Do you believe in God? **I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.** (*'catholic' means 'universal'*)

## Prayer of thanksgiving

*The minister says:*

God of life, through the breaking of waters and the coming of the Spirit, you bring us new birth;  
you give the living water, which becomes in us an eternal spring quenching our thirst, flowing through us and refreshing us for eternal life.

Washed and cleansed, we are called into service with Christ.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, bless this water, and those to be baptised in it, that they may be born anew, live in your light all their days, and come to share your likeness; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**



*Water is poured into the font by Daniel Jackson*



## The Baptism

*The minister says:*

Narges, for you Jesus Christ has come, has lived, has suffered; for you he endured the agony of Gethsemane and the darkness of Calvary; for you he uttered the cry, 'It is accomplished!'

For you he triumphed over death; for you he prays at God's right hand; for you, Narges, even before you were born. In baptism, the word of the apostle is confirmed: 'We love, because God first loved us'.



### The Baptism

**Narges, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

*The people respond:*

**Amen.**

The minister marks the sign of the cross on Narges's forehead with olive oil.

*The minister says:*

Narges, from this day on, the sign of the cross is upon you.

### Confirmation

The minister invites the following people to come forward and lay hands on Narges; Daniel, Julie, Jill.

*The minister asks the ministry team and members of church council to stand in a semi-circle, hold out their hands and join in prayers.*

**Narges kneels.**

*The minister calls the people to silent prayer.*

*The minister, with both hands extended over Narges, offers this prayer as hands are laid on her shoulders.*

By the Holy Spirit, gracious God, strengthen these your servants, and set their hearts on fire with love for you. Increase in them your gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and wonder in your presence, the spirit of joy and delight in your service, now and forever.

**Amen.**

*The minister presents Narges to the congregation saying:*

Narges is now received into the one holy catholic and apostolic Church according to Christ's command.

Please welcome Narges by applauding.

### Hymn 776 Aaronic Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine up- on you and be gra- cious  
un- to you. The Lord lift up his coun- te- nance up- on you, and give you peace.

### Narges' - statement of faith

I became a Christian because I feel a strong connection with what Christ taught. I want my life to have meaning, and I found a group of people who care about love and kindness.

I decided to make this change because I really wanted a spiritual connection. The teachings of Christ, which focus on love and forgiveness, helped me make this big decision.

Loving Jesus means following his teachings in my life, trying to be a good person. To me, Jesus is someone whose ministry was a long time ago, but his ideas about love and mercy are still important.

During this journey, I've learnt that faith is about exploring and growing. It's not about having all the answers but being okay with not knowing everything. It's a lifelong journey of discovering and becoming a better person.

I believe Jesus shows us how much God loves us and how important it is to be kind and forgive others. His sacrifice and coming back to life give us hope for a fresh start.

My thoughts about God have changed into seeing God as a loving presence who cares about our lives. God is not just a powerful force; it's like having a friend who cares about us.

To me, God is like a source of endless love and understanding, guiding us to be better and helping us in our journey to be spiritually enlightened.

My journey started in my home country, where I attended church services and felt a deep appreciation for worship. Even in France, my love for church continued. However, as a Muslim facing challenges in changing my religion, it wasn't until I discovered a local church in our neighborhood in Melbourne that everything fell into place.

Meeting Jill was a pivotal moment. She warmly explained the worship services, invited me to my first service, and from that Sunday on, I was captivated by the music, collective singing, and the profoundly spiritual atmosphere. This church became more than a place of worship; it became a source of inspiration and deep appreciation.

Now, every Sunday, I eagerly attend worship services, finding a unique and enriching experience. This church, with its collective spirit and atmosphere, has become the perfect place for me to take the significant step of changing my religion.

## Responses

*The minister then says to Narges*

You have been baptised into the faith of Christ, and are called to the worship, witness and service of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Will you continue in the community of faith, the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread and the prayers?

**With God's help, I will.**

Will you proclaim, by word and example, the good news of God in Christ?

**With God's help, I will.**

Will you seek Christ in all people, and love your neighbour as yourself?

**With God's help, I will.**

Will you strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being?

**With God's help, I will.**

May the God of grace, who has given us new birth by water and the Spirit, keep us steadfast in the faith of Christ and bring us to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The minister addresses the congregation.*

Friends in Christ, will you promise to maintain a life of worship and teaching, witness and service so that Narges may grow to maturity in Christ?



**With God's help, we will live out our baptism as a loving community in Christ: nurturing one another in faith, upholding one another in prayer, and encouraging one another in service, until Christ comes.**

### Recollection of Baptism – The minister sprinkles water on members of the congregation

Sisters and brothers: Always remember you are baptised, and give thanks to the risen Lord.

#### Offering Prayer

Lord and giver of every good thing we bring to you our lives and gifts for your kingdom all for transformation through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Saviour, amen.

#### Prayers of the people

God of love, we rejoice again to receive your grace in Word and Sacrament. We have heard your call and are made new by your Spirit.

Guide and guard Narges all her days. May your love hold her, your truth guide her, your joy delight her. And may her family be blessed, with the love that endures all things, we ask this through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

## The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Peter Cannon)

### Invitation

Come, all who look for hope and seek peace. Here is a place where you are welcome. Here is a place where you can rest in the heart of love.

***We come to this table, knowing our need for it.***

### Communion Prayer

God be with you. ***And also with you.***

Lift up your hearts. ***We lift them up to God.***

Let us give thanks to God. ***It is right to give God thanks and praise.***

We come waiting. ***We come hoping.***

Seeking a way. ***Finding a way.***

Sensing your heartbeat.

*(Pause.)*

Your presence is revealed in a loaf of bread. ***Your grace is shown in a simple cup.***

We are invited to remember Jesus. ***And so we remember.***

For here we see sacrifice, love, and abundant grace.

***And the Spirit of Christ walks with us and lives within us.***

By the gift of your Spirit, you complete the work of your son. You lead us into a new life and give us power to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. And so we praise you saying with all of creation...

***Holy, holy, holy, God of power and might.***

***Heaven and earth are full, are full of your glory.***

***Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is the One who comes in God's name.***

***Hosanna in the highest.***

We experience anew the presence of your son Jesus when we eat this bread and drink from this cup. We look forward to his coming again and the reality of his ongoing presence with us always. Breathe now upon this bread and wine, breathe now upon your people who feast on these gifts. Like this meal, may we be a sign and celebration of your transforming love. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord in whose name we are bold to pray...

### 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.

### The Breaking of the Bread

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

***The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.***

The gifts of God for the people of God

### The Distribution

#### Prayer after Communion

As we have received your love, may we share your love. We move forward from here, strengthened, renewed, and empowered by your Spirit to make all of our living and loving, a true and joyful witness to him. We look to that day when, with all your people, we may share life and love with him in your kingdom. Send us as your witnesses into the whole world, empowered by your Spirit and in the name of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

#### Hymn 531 Sent Forth by God's Blessing

Omer Westendorf 2015 from Journey Songs V24

<https://youtu.be/PLp85eLlAlM?si=TlzcqvvrxfyM5Z>

## Presentation of the Baptismal Candle and Certificates

*Daniel takes a white candle, lights it from the Christ Candle standing near the font, and presents it to Narges, saying:*

Narges, you belong to Christ, the light of the world.

*The minister says:*

Let your light so shine before the world that all may see your good works  
and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

*A certificate of baptism and confirmation is presented to Narges by Julie Hawkey*

### Blessing

The Spirit who hovered over the face of the waters at creation, at your birth and your baptism and confirmation  
grant you the gift of the freedom of Christ:  
in the name of God, who created you, who formed you and who loves you. **Amen.**

### Dismissal

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good;  
render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the faint-hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted;  
honour all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### Hymn 779 May the Feet of God

Robyn and Dorothy Mann 2015

<https://youtu.be/WfOFIWxGaP8?si=QfFbkUmKRAL-F1Ac>

*Narges, Daniel, Jill, and Julie leave with the minister, with Narges holding her lighted candle.*