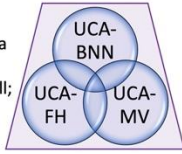




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

The Uniting Church in Australia
Congregations of: Blackburn
North / Nunawading; Forest Hill;
and Mountview (Mitcham);
in a shared ministry together



Sunday 11th December 2022

Praise God from whom all Blessings Flow (with Lyrics) md 1801 2012

Thomas Ken 1637-1711 *alt.*

<https://youtu.be/RBz7vuJ2b1A>

Welcome

May the Worship bless you

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge those who were here before us, the first inhabitants of this place
We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.



Photo by T. Lyndon

Call to Worship

Our souls magnify the Lord

Our Spirit rejoices in God our saviour

God has looked with favour upon us

Holy is God's name, for God has done great things for us

Prayer of Adoration

Wonderful Powerful God

Lord over all the universe

We give you thanks and praise

When the rains come even the deserts and flowers praise you

Those of fearful hearts become strong in you and they no longer fear

The blind, the lame and the deaf are restored in their hearts

They leap for joy

Here is your God

Happy are those whose help is in the Lord

Jesus our Lord
 Mary your mother rejoiced and gave thanks to God for bearing you in her womb
 Her spirit rejoiced
 She loved you Lord, as we love you
 She rejoiced in God, for your coming
 As we rejoice in God for your coming

Here is your God
Happy are those whose help is in the Lord

Holy Spirit, bearer of God's life,
 you strengthen our soul
 Because of you we can leap for joy
 You, Holy Spirit, set us free from burdens
 You give us freedom and joy
 Holy Spirit bearer of life
 You bring us blessings and joy

Here is your God
Happy are those whose help is in the Lord

Prayer of Invocation

Come Holy Spirit, Come
 Inspire and equip us for future ministry
Come Holy Spirit, Come

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, forgive us for any words that have created division or have hurt another
Forgive us for any actions that caused pain or hurt to another

Lord, help us leave behind the words and actions of yesterday that have not been life-giving to others, ourselves, or
 our church community

Help us embrace words that build up others
Transform our hearts and help us make a fresh start and new beginning

Lord, in this moment of silence we come before you with all that's on our hearts
Seeking forgiveness and the grace to forgive others and ourselves

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Your sins are Forgiven"
THANKS BE TO GOD

Psalm 146:5-10 (responsorial)

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God,

⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;

⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
⁸ **the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.**

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
¹⁰ **The LORD will reign for ever,**

your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Hymn - O Come O Come Emmanuel
(Piano/Cello) The Piano Guys 2012

(40 million people have watched this moving YouTube)

Anon. Latin, 18th century or earlier based on Antiphons from 9th cent. or earlier *tr.* John Mason Neale 1818-66 *alt.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO7ySn-Swwc>

Advent Wreath Week 3 – Joy

(One person lights the candle and the congregation say the responses in bold)

On this third Sunday of advent, we light the candles of Hope and Peace again
(Light the first two purple candles)

We celebrate the joy Jesus has brought us in his message of compassion, restoration, and healing.
A joy that spreads as we embrace his words and actions.

We light the third candle and call it Joy.
Lights third purple candle

This candle reminds us God wants us to rejoice, even when it feels hard to do.
It is a symbol of the joy that comes when God is with us.

O God come, travel with us through advent. Give us courage to spread joy in the world, amen

Hymn 152 Joyful, Joyful, we Adore Thee, at Royal Albert Hall, London

Henry Van Dyke 1852-1933 *alt.*

HI Maachen 2013

<https://youtu.be/eMY3ivdNzwE>



Photo by T. Lyndon

Readings – Margot Kemke

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus ²it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ³Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.’ ⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,^[a] the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it,^[b] but it shall be for God’s people;^[c] no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray. ⁹No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

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Luke 1:46b-55

⁴⁶And Mary^[a] said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’



Photo by T. Lyndon

Young at Heart – Congregational discussion

What is joy?

Sermon – Rev Tina



(Image from RCL)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen

This image of Mary was painted by Frank Wesley who was born in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh into a 5th generation Christian family of Hindu and Muslim descent. His painting is called the 'Blue Madonna'. She looks like she is deep in prayer and is a more mature Mary.

In contrast we have the brave song of a young girl who has come to know she is pregnant with Jesus. Who has come to know who Jesus is and what that means for her.

Her song is of a young girl aged around fifteen, maybe younger, who lives in a patriarchal society. Who is engaged and has found herself pregnant, where she is not yet formally married. She lives in an unkind society where Romans and the wealthy and powerful oppress most of the people. Perhaps it was a society that treated ordinary people as outsiders and unwelcome.

Mary sings a song that witnesses to her faith in God. There is no fear in her song. She is aware of the power of God over all that exists and the little power of those who claim to have power.

Her song is for all the oppressed like her.

She comes to know who she is bearing in her womb. She comes to know God has lifted her up and blessed her. Her holy awe, her fear for God, and awareness of God's great strength and power tells her there has been a permanent reversal of power for all time.

She comes to know God loves the oppressed and downtrodden like her and embraces them. She knows her place in the universe. She celebrates God's powerful actions in all creation and within her womb. She was lowly yet God had raised her up.

What's so amazing is a young girl living in a society that didn't value women's voices has left us a song of love and praise for God that draws us into awe and joy and moves us to praise and worship God.

It is a cry of triumph for the oppressed who God comes to and embraces with love. A young girl God loves.

Mary's song gives us hope that all the oppressed of all ages will be raised up by God. It is a song that celebrates God's actions on behalf of all the oppressed. God is for her and all those like her. God battles for her and all those like her. God blesses the spiritually hungry.

All those who stand against God's purposes don't do so well. Luke's gospel speaks of Jesus reversing situations where the powerful oppress people. God blesses the oppressed.

Mary introduces what Jesus will speak of in many different situations in the gospels. Jesus' and Mary's voice is still heard today. Their voice is a source of hope for many. God's battle cry spoken by a mere child. It's an amazing song to sing during Roman occupation and when the people were oppressed by religious leaders and Christians became a persecuted people for many centuries. Her song witnesses that God is there for the oppressed and persecuted.

How has God acted in your life? Have you ever experienced being oppressed by others and then been raised up by God?

There are many situations or things that can make us feel oppressed. People, health issues, financial problems, limitations that come from aging or living in a country where we cannot express our faith openly or where we are discriminated against.

I went to a church where World Vision had invited Burmese refugees to share their stories. A Karen woman sang *Amazing Grace* and her face lit up with joy and peace. She sang and her song celebrated her faith in God and that despite persecution and having to flee her country and home, she had not been crushed by the experience. God had raised her up and she was free. Her face was pure joy and light.

God is there for those who know of God's great power over their lives and all creation. God is mindful of us and loves us and is there for us.

Josh Groban – You Raise me up

(Official music video) Warner vault. 2009

From the Album Closer 2003

(144 million people have viewed this YouTube. It has given hope to many people. The song portrays a strong faith in God and speaks of power and strength through faith.

<https://youtu.be/aJxrX42WcjQ>

Hymn -Amazing Grace

Gary Downey 2011 Sung by Judy Collins

<https://youtu.be/CDdvReNKKuk>

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 for those who have Covid

Prayers for those amongst us who have Covid and their families and for those who have had Covid and recovered.

Prayers for those who have died (Currently worldwide 6,652,430, Australia 16,304)

This version of Amazing Grace was recorded during the worst of the Lockdowns.

Andrea Bocelli (Live from Duomo di Milano) 2020

John Newton 1725-1807 *alt*

<https://youtu.be/bpXwOSHTwsY>

Prayers of the People – Rhonda Goodall from Mountivew

Lord our God, how great you are. You never cease to amaze us, Lord, with your constant love, faith in us, friendship and forgiveness which is beyond all measure.

Today, Lord, we pray for the people of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, all autocratic Southeast Asian countries. Cambodia previously a Khmer Empire ruled by the notorious Pol Pot who was responsible for widespread genocide and leaving a country riddled with land mines which have caused untold suffering, serious injuries and limb

amputations. The population now is mainly rural and a major challenge for world health organisations is the high percentage of young people suffering from Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV/Aids, unwanted pregnancies, and septic abortions. Assist their leaders, Lord, to address these issues by reducing poverty and improving the health and education systems to address these problems which cause so much misery.

Laos, a Socialist land-locked State also has extreme poverty amongst its people. Hunger and corruption by government officials and human rights issues remain its major problems. It is the poorest country in Southeast Asia. Its population is largely unskilled and there is inadequate infrastructure. Lord, encourage the government to govern for the people by reducing poverty, corruption and improving the living standards, health, and education for its population.

We also pray for the people of Vietnam which suffers from the same problems faced by Cambodia and Laos. Again Lord, encourage the government to redistribute wealth more equitably to improve the lot of its population.

In our ecumenical prayers, Lord we pray for the parish of St John the Evangelist under the guidance of Father Dispin John and their ministries including Project Compassion. Be with their leaders as they continue to assist the many residents of the parish as they rely on this ministry.

Our prayers include the Uniting church at Yarra Junction, the Bridgewater Centre in the city of Casey and the Rowville Uniting Church. We give thanks for and the continuing good work of the programs run by the churches and centre for parents to build their skills to raise their children, with love and resilience thus empowering parents and guardians to provide also a safe and nurturing environment for their children with access to support networks. Bless the leaders and volunteers responsible for these programs which provide a very necessary resource for the community in which they serve.

Lord, we remember in our prayers the Whitehorse cluster. We pray for our Ministers as they bring your word to us and minister to our needs within the cluster. We also remember those who are sick, suffering or grieving. Comfort them, Lord, with your presence and give them peace and serenity in their time of need.

Lord, as we leave this place today be with us in the coming week during the good and not-so-good times. Grant us the grace to do all things in your name and as we close our prayer, we conclude with the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us 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.

Hymn 665 Jesus Christ is Waiting

John Bell & Graham Moule Iona Community 1988 Tune – 'Noel Nouvelet'

Chet Valley churches 2020

https://youtu.be/CSzEviUc_o

Blessing

We go in Peace
in the love of God
in the Power of the Spirit
May the Lord Bless and Guard us
May the Lord make His face shine upon us
and be gracious unto us
As we bring Christ's love
and peace to the world. Amen

Hymn You shall go out with Joy

Chet Valley Churches 2020

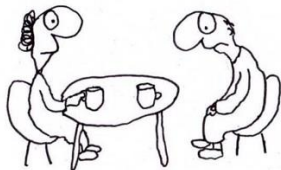
<https://youtu.be/ivfUKd6AFXw>

Steffi Geiser Rubin 1950-
based on Isaiah 55:12

Pastoral care tips – Rev Tina

Leunig used with permission

Joan Chittister in her book: ***The Gift of Years*** (Growing old gracefully) writes about joy and quotes Seneca. *(Used with permission and adapted)*



“As for old age,” Seneca said, “embrace and love it. It abounds with pleasure if you know how to use it.”

Joan refers to our society as productivity centred and asks: *What happens to life once the regular routine ends?*

In western societies I’ve heard many people say once they retired, they became even more busy. In contrast, I’ve heard that in Japan, one of the busiest eastern societies, when some people retire, they set off on one of the many pilgrimages throughout the country to embrace a new way of being.

Joan speaks of when we first retire (or lose a role), the slate may be clean, and the days may be ours. The task is to *“learn how to live again.”* It is a time to find new meaning in life.

She says: *We can decide to live with joy or allow ourselves to look back with bitterness. Some people can be bitter about all the things they wanted to do and felt too constrained to risk doing. For some the burden of the last stage of life may be a feeling of displacement.*

Perhaps losing one’s role is seen by some as a loss rather than an opportunity that opens the way to new choices and roles. As we move forward as a new congregation some will experience being displaced. We have all heard the saying: *When doors close and we let go, it allows new doors to open, with new roles and opportunities.*

After retirement or losing a role many may, *plunge into joy and live a new unscripted life with joy... Where they are thankful for where they’ve been and all they’ve done and given to others. Thankful because for the first time, perhaps, it’s possible for them to decide what they really want to do with their life, rather than what they must do, or should do or ought to do. Have you ever felt like this?*

Joan says, *“You can decide to walk gently through this last great stage of life when everything begins to come together for us, to make sense, to have new meaning. We can simply sit and watch a sunset, since we are not rushing home through traffic as the sun goes down.” There’s a lot of freedom of choice after retirement.*

Others may even venture into new territory in the third stage of their life, where they pursue something totally new, where they become a learner again and feel the excitement that comes from setting off on a new journey.

We have many choices, options, and opportunities in the third stage of our lives which may begin after sixty or seventy or even later.

Trust God as we all move ahead into the future, together.



Photo by T Lyndon

YouTube - Amy Grant – Breath of Heaven (Mary’s Song) 2019
<https://youtu.be/FWo3qlqyW1c>

Holy is the Lord

Simon Khorolskiy 2021 Based on Isaiah.

Simon was born in Russia and his family emigrated to The States when he was two. His YouTubes are something quite different

This one tells the story about Isaiah’s call against a backdrop of amazing scenery.

https://youtu.be/I_402FDIG_Y