

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Service for the Lord's Day
17th December 2024
Advent 4



Image: "[Magnificat](#)," © Jan Richardson.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Here we meet.
Here we encounter.
Here we worship God.
Here we will encounter Christ, the Joy of all creation.
Here we will celebrate what it means, to be the people of God in this place.
Here we will give thanks for the Word made Flesh.
Here we will love with Joy.
Here we will worship God.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Come, great spirit of Joy, and fill our hearts and minds today.
Come, miraculous laughter, and help us to rejoice.
Come, enlivening comforter, and give us the courage to proclaim and celebrate all that sparks the divine flame within us.
Come, wondrous light,
and lead us on this path toward new life.
Come, for we are ready to hear your words and feel your presence.
Come, for we are your people, longing to be renewed.
Amen.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

We wait.
We wait – not because we do not know the story of Jesus, and not because you are not already and always here.
We wait because to wait is to expect something more.
To wait is to expect that the story might enter our hearts and our world in new ways, to bring the change for which we long.
On the first Sunday in advent we lit the candle of Hope.
Last week we lit the candle of Peace.
As we light our third Advent Candle, the pink one, we celebrate the Joy of having Christ in our lives.
We light the Advent Candle and remind ourselves of the ways God brings Joy into our world, and we live in the Hope that You will use us to bring about Joy in our world this Advent Season.
We give thanks for the messengers – the apostles, prophets, artists, sages, faithful ones – present in every age, who bring us the good news of God's restoring love; and we shout with joy, trusting that God is with us and before us, and that joy will be born anew in us.

HYMN: TiS 152

"Joyful, joyful, we adore you."

<https://youtu.be/mtvxwsiRge4?si=KdcGVpDYH5CLwcm0>

GREETING AND INTRODUCTION:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

We gather this morning for worship on the lands belonging to the Wurungeri people of the Kulin Nations.
We pay our respects to their Elders, Past and Present.
We commit to listening to the Voices of their Emerging Leaders.
We are thankful for the Joy of relationships between First and Second Peoples.
Today, on the third Sunday of Advent as Christmas draws closer and our third candle has been lit, an element of mystery confronts our anticipation.

In the wilderness, John speaks of the light, bearing witness to one among the people 'that they do not know'.
Who is he, and who is John?
Is his witness trustworthy?

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

God, we hear so many different voices around us. We confess it isn't always easy to recognise which ones come from you, or to find our own voice and be true to it.

Forgive us for the times when we try to speak with a voice that is not our own.

For the times when we deliberately ignore other people's voices because we don't understand what they are saying, or we don't like what we hear.

We ask you to forgive us for the times we don't even hear the voices of others because we are so taken up with ourselves.

Help us, O God.

Forgive us, Loving God, and grant us a listening ear.

Amen.

WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

The Living God will bring about justice and praise in every nation on earth, like flowers blooming in a garden.

The good news is that in Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

SHARING GOD'S PEACE:

The peace of the Living God be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O Creator, we wait in readiness, longing to receive the promise of new life, which Isaiah and the prophets foretold and the gospels proclaim.

Abide with us in this time of gestation so that when the great birth occurs, we will be faithful nurturers of your word and world

Amen.

THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11 CEV

The Spirit of the LORD God has taken control of me!

The LORD has chosen and sent me to tell the oppressed the good news, to heal the brokenhearted, and to announce freedom for prisoners and captives.

This is the year when the LORD God will show kindness to us and punish our enemies.

The LORD has sent me to comfort those who mourn, especially in Jerusalem.

He sent me to give them flowers in place of their sorrow, olive oil in place of tears, and joyous praise in place of broken hearts.

They will be called "Trees of Justice," planted by the LORD to honour his name.

Then they will rebuild cities that have been in ruins for many generations.

I, the LORD, love justice! But I hate robbery and injustice.

My people, I solemnly promise to reward you with an eternal agreement.

Your descendants will be known in every nation.

All who see them will realize that they have been blessed, by me, the LORD.

I celebrate and shout because of my LORD God. His saving power and justice are the very clothes I wear. They are more beautiful than the jewellery worn by a bride or a groom.

The LORD will bring about justice and praise in every nation on earth, like flowers blooming in a garden.

REFLECTION ON THE READING

In this passage we hear the voice of the prophet Isaiah speaking a word of hope to the people of Israel, who have been devastated by the armies of Babylon.

They are poor, powerless, and hurting, yet the prophet speaks of a God of justice who comes with liberation and favour.

God, it seems, is on the side of the powerless.

When I hear these words of the prophet, I wonder, What does this mean for me?

I am not oppressed. I am comfortable.

Well fed.

Free.

I have choices and power.

Is the coming of the God of justice good news for me?

Before I can get to "yes," perhaps I must first be convicted by these words and allow them to break me open.

Am I mindful of the brokenheartedness of others?

Does the oppression in the world break my heart?

If my heart is in tune with God's heart, the answer will be yes.

Of course, there are many forms of oppression, and no one in this life is free of suffering.

We are all together in one common humanity that can unite us if we realize that our liberation is bound up with everyone else's.

If you are not free, I am not free.

So part of this good news is that, as the people of God, we get to share in God's liberating work!

Whether we are powerful or powerless, we are called to be God's people and announce God's love for all.

We get to help build a world where no one is oppressed, where all are fed, where power is shared, and where no one is lost.

Now that's good news!

O God who sees the suffering of the oppressed, give us eyes to see and hearts to care. Thank you for setting us free. Help us do the same for others, in your holy name. Amen.

THE GOSPEL:

John 1: 6-8,19-28 (NRSVUE)

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²²So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight^[a] the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

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REFLECTION ON THE READING

In our reading we find John the Baptist being questioned by religious leaders. It seems as if all the powers that be have joined together to find out what John is up to. You can tell by the way they interrogate him that they did not make the long trip from Jerusalem because they wanted to hear a word from God. They are on a mission to put John in his place. They ask John, “Who are you?” in several different ways. They want to know if he’s claiming to be the Messiah, to be Elijah, or to be a prophet. To all of these questions, John answers no. He doesn’t fit into any of their boxes. He simply says that he is “the voice crying out in the wilderness,” standing far outside the structures of their institutions.

He’s just a voice preparing the way for the One who is coming after him.

His answers don’t satisfy them, so they begin to question his authority.

Behind their question—“Why are you baptizing?”—is the question, “Who do you think you are?”

Again, John evades their questions and simply points to the One who is coming.

He cannot be managed or silenced by them.

Often the coming of God into the world does more to disrupt the status quo than it does to reinforce it—and that is true in our hearts as well as our institutions.

As we prepare to welcome Christ, let us get ready for him to disrupt our complacency.

Let us be open to the life-upending arrival of the Messiah.

O Holy One, come into our hearts and into our world once again. Break us open and move among us as you will. Keep us from trying to manage you. Lead us out of old patterns into new ways of loving and living. Amen.

HYMN: TiS 161

“Tell out my soul.”

https://youtu.be/k6vwAAyYTMc?si=3S0zm4eoOMi_57DT

OFFERING PRAYER

Generous God,

We pray for our offerings.

May we use them to create a safer world.

A world where people can experience the Joy of Your love, safe from the fear of war and terror.

May our community be one of peace and joy.

We pray for the work of Act for Peace and their partners in Jordan and Syria. Amen

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

Lord God, as we today uphold the testimony of John the Baptist, we remember all those called to testify.

May they do so in truth and in love.

We remember those whose lives have been blighted by false testimony;

those who have had no one to speak up for them; those whose testimony has not been believed; and those who were convicted without hearing.

You, whose Son knew all these injustices still keep on bringing light.

You brought light into the darkness of death and, despite all the world’s best efforts, that light has not been put out.

May all those whose lights have been extinguished through injustice and prejudice, through violence and

fear, hear testimony to you and, in believing, know hope once more.

God, as we rejoice to receive your light, the light that shines in the darkness, and cannot be extinguished, may we also welcome that light into the darkness in us that we'd rather hide.

In the light of your love, may we be changed so that there is no need to fear the light.

May we believe that you can change us.

May we believe that your love and your light can penetrate the walls that we build.

So make us open and by your light and your love set us free from the prisons we make for ourselves.

In this place, built to reflect your light and your love, we confess all that mars your image in us, all that diminishes our witness to you.

Silence

God of light and love, scare out those dark corners with the assurance of your forgiveness and make us beacons for you, witnessing to all around.

Amen.

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 for ever.

Amen.

HYMN: TiS 272

"Come thou long-expected Jesus."

<https://youtu.be/GspGM7Pfizo>

DISMISSAL AND BLESSING:

Go from this place filled with Joy because of what God is doing in our world.

Go now, as people of God.

Go assured that God is love, and God is the Joy of our world.

Go to love your neighbour as yourselves.

Go now, held in the loving hands of God Most High.

Go now, and follow Christ in all things.

Go now, in the love and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace and may almighty God bless you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.