

Introduction To Worship

Sunday 20th December 2020 – Advent 4



This week offers a feast for you. The theme is love and it is the last week of advent. I hope it has been a blessed journey for you as you have prepared your hearts for the birth of Christ.

The image of an artist's palette reminds us of how each one of us is unique. God made us and our faith journeys may be different from one another, but we are united in Christ and in our faith in Him.

We are celebrating Christmas Eve in the church buildings and you likely have already received a notice. May you be blessed by this service.

This year we will celebrate Christmas Day in our homes. It is a moment in history. A moment to hold fast to and celebrate. God being born into our homes.

The Christmas Day worship is being video recorded, and so you can choose when to participate in the worship. It will have lots of carols which you may choose to sing along with your loved ones at any time that suits your family. The written materials will also include some meaningful Christmas YouTubes and images.

May this Christmas Day be a joyful time for your loved ones and for you.

May today's worship bless you.

Blessings
Rev Tina



Mountview Uniting Church

Mountview Worship @ Home

Sunday 20th December 2020 – Advent 4



icon from Benedictine Monastery, Camperdown



Hymn: As The Deer Pants (all verses)

– Helen Jackson [2:45]

<https://youtu.be/sEXSfoeP7iw>

Music & Lyrics: Martin Nystrom 1956– ; based on Psalm 42: 1-2;
© M. Nystrom / Maranatha Music. Lyrics Reproduced (below) &
Streamed by permission. CCLI Licence No. 122303 [MUC]
Video: © 2020 the Multimedia team. All Rights Reserved.
Posted to YouTube by Mountview Uniting Church.

As The Deer Pants

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

Refrain

You alone are my strength, my shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

I want you more than gold or silver,
only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy giver
and the apple of my eye.

Refrain

You're my friend and you are my brother,
even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other,
so much more than anything.

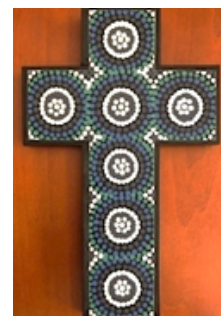
Refrain

Welcome To Our Service

Our theme is love, where God dwells in our hearts

Acknowledgement

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.



Call To Worship

An ancient promise is coming true
God's love lasts forever

A secret mystery is being revealed
God's love lasts forever

A little child will soon be born
God's love lasts forever

Advent Liturgy – Week Four – Love

Light the candles of Hope; Peace; and Joy

Person 1 A young woman confronted by the call of God in her life. what shall she do? Where shall she go? Mary accepted the call that God placed within her heart and proclaimed that the very core of who she is belongs to God. A God who is merciful, strong, one who cares for those who are the “least of these”. God’s call comes to each of us as well – a call to serve, to be Christ’s love in the world. For young adults, the call often pulls them into a time of discernment, a time to explore how they can share their faith with others through missionary service. It is clear however, that God calls each of us, at all times in our lives, to serve others in God’s name. How will God use you to bring hope to those who have lost hope? How will God use you to lift up others, to be with the stranger, and to share God’s love? How will you answer the call to servant ministry in the name of the Child of love this Advent?

Person 1 Listen! God is calling you to be in ministry with others in Christ’s name.

All: We offer our lives to the Child of Love

Person 1 Listen! Prayerfully discern how you will use your gifts and talents to be with others in Christ’s name.

All: We offer our lives to the Child of Love

Person 1 Listen! Accept Christ’s call to be in servant ministry with and among all of God’s people throughout your life

All: The Child of Love is coming!

Light the candle of Love



Hymn: Light One Candle For Love – Helen Jackson
 [1:31]

<https://youtu.be/-XQB4zoLF9o>

*Music & Lyrics: Natalie Sleeth 1930-92;
 © N. Sleeth / Hinshaw Music; Permission to stream obtained from ONE
 LICENSE #A-620587 [MUC] Video: © 2020 the Multimedia team.
 All Rights Reserved. Posted to YouTube by Mountview Uniting Church.*

Prayers Of Adoration, Invocation And Confession

Loving God, our soul magnifies you, our spirit rejoices in you
 for you find favour with us
 you give us strength and courage
 to embrace our call
 to live out our life loving you
 Jesus our Lord, we rejoice in you
 born into our hearts
 you call us and we follow you
 you bless us, we give you thanks and praise

Holy Spirit, come into our hearts and lives
 so, we may comprehend what God has done for us
 Help us leap for joy and cherish what God has done for us
 Help us understand the mystery of how God has made his home in Mary's womb,
 until it came time for Jesus, God with us, to be born
 The revealing of what was hidden
 which words cannot describe
 Help our hearts know God in Jesus

Lord, if during this time we have hurt another,
 forgive us and transform our hearts
 Give us grace to accept forgiveness or offer forgiveness

In this silence Lord, we come to you
 with all that's on our hearts
 Help us see and know your love and glory Lord.
 Help us draw near to you and make a new beginning in our lives.

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Your sins are forgiven"

Thanks be to God

Hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel – [Choir name not stated] [3:45]

https://youtu.be/7xtpJ4Q_Q-4

Music: Plainsong melody (15th cent.). Lyrics: Based on Antiphons from 9th cent. or earlier; Anon., Latin, 18th cent. or earlier; tr. John Mason Neale 1818-66 alt. Song: Public Domain Posted to YouTube by Megan Smith

Scripture Readings

*NRSV. © National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide
 Sometimes an alternate text source (a paraphrase) is used to aid with study and reflection.*

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

7:1 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 7:2 the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." 7:3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

7:4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan:

7:5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?

7:6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. 7:7 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

7:8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; 7:9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 7:10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly 7:11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 7:16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Romans 16: 25-27

16:25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 16:26 but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – 16:27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Luke 1: 26-38, 46b-55

1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 1:27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

1:28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

1:29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

1:30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

1:31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

1:32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

1:33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

1:34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

1:35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

1:36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

1:38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

1:46b "My soul magnifies the Lord, 1:47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 1:48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 1:49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 1:50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 1:51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 1:52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 1:53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 1:54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 1:55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Song: When A Child Is Born – Queen's Cross Church Choir []

<https://fb.watch/2o3nwlEng/>

Composers: Ciro Dammico 1947– ; and Dario Baldan Bembo 1948– . Lyrics (English): Friedrich Alex Jacobson 1914-88. Posted to FaceBook by Church Of Scotland

For The Young At Heart



Angel drawn by a Scottish Child

Children love the stories about angels and wisemen. The gift givers. Angels travelling from heaven, bringing messages of hope and call. Wisemen travelling from far away, bringing wisdom and gifts.

We love gifts, giving them and receiving them. They express love. I thought about my travels through third world nations and a lady who asked me to take her photo and give her money. I gave her some. I wonder now what would have happened if I gave her a loan of enough money to change her life and asked her to pass it on to another, when she could. She was collecting firewood. Perhaps her life was rich in love and not possessions or they didn't matter. Perhaps her dignity was enough. We judge people's situation on western nations standards, on how wealthy people are financially. When that is not how God entered the world in Jesus, who lay in a food trough which we call a manger. The angels and wise men came from a distance to witness the birth of God in Jesus. Perhaps it is enough for us to invite Jesus into the manger of our heart.

Sermon

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



Every year Lorne has a sculpture exhibition during the summer. This picture is of a sand labyrinth with a young boy running around the pathways to the centre symbolising being close to God and then the perimeters, being far from God or on the journey. The labyrinth represents whatever the person walking relates to or ponders on as they walk. The boy may have just been enjoying running through the labyrinth and perhaps felt something stirring in his heart. That can be an experience of God for some people. I once listened to a sermon where one question was asked: How big is your God box? Many of us know God as being present to us, in our lives, within us, around us, before us, guiding us, helping us and loving us. We have a personal relationship with God and wherever we go on our journey through life, we know God is with us. We also know God cannot be contained or boxed in or defined. God is mystery. In fact, we are often lost for words when trying to describe God or say how we feel about God. Like Mary, we have a heartfelt response to God from the depths of our being.

The reading from Samuel addresses a question. Where does God reside? The people believed God resided in a tabernacle and they kept the tabernacle in a tent. When they travelled and moved from place to place, they carried the tabernacle and when they stayed it was in a tent. King David and his people settled permanently in a place. King David built himself a house made of cedarwood. He then decided to build a house for God. God spoke to the Prophet Nathan and asked him to deliver a message to King David, reminding him of his humble beginnings as a shepherd boy.

Asking him: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in?

God had not asked for a cedar house to dwell in. It is God's initiative where God dwells. God reminded David he had been with them wherever they travelled. It is God who decides to make David a house. Not one of cedar but the House of David, a house made of people. A house and kingdom, the house of David, where his throne will be forever. A human household with a destiny and purpose as planned by God.

God who is mystery. God who was revealed in Jesus. Before that time there was a long silence, a time when people didn't know the face of God. When Jesus came, they knew the face of God.

The revelation of God in Jesus began with the story of Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel.

Luke, said to be a physician, didn't know about the process of conception or about genetics or did not have access to scans to see a baby. He simply knew a child was conceived. Words can be limiting when we talk about spiritual encounters with God. Luke tells Mary's story of being called just like Moses, Isaiah and other prophets. Gabriel comes to Mary with a message from God and we are invited to ponder about it.

Words cannot do this story justice. A story that was told again and again throughout the ages, until Luke wrote it down. A story that begins for us when Gabriel greets Mary telling her she is favoured by God and God is with her.



Stained glass window from Scottish Church

Mary lived in Nazareth, a small unknown town in Israel, where the people were lowly and humble, like Mary. At first, she feels perplexed and ponders on Gabriel's words. Gabriel reassures her: Do not fear. Fear would be a normal response to something unexplainable, especially for a young woman. The angel delivers his message. Mary will conceive a child in her womb, will call him Jesus, and the child is the Son of God and he will receive the throne of his ancestor David and will reign over the house of Jacob and his kingdom will have no end.

This is not an ordinary kingdom. It is the kingdom of God.

Mary has a question: How can this be, for I am a virgin?

She was betrothed to Joseph, a formal contract between families, and the final ceremony had not yet taken place. Gabriel explained how the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would conceive, and the child would be holy, the Son of God and a sign would be that her cousin Elizabeth who was barren, is now six months pregnant.

For nothing is impossible for God. Imagine what this was like for a young uneducated village girl who was about thirteen. It is difficult enough for us to comprehend. It seems like a creation story; it seems like a call story. It is not to be taken at a surface level.



What is amazing is Mary's response. It is like all those called by God. Here I am, the servant of the Lord. It is no ordinary account. Mary surrenders to this call. Her bravery stands out.

Paul called it: Obedient faith.

Not long after her call, Mary goes to see Elizabeth, perhaps to find out if she is pregnant. She is, just as the angel said and the baby in her womb leaps for Joy, the future John the Baptist. For those of us who have been pregnant, babies do stretch, and you can see little feet pushing out pregnant tummies. Elizabeth knew her baby well and must have sensed a different movement and in it, and through the movement of the Holy Spirit knew Mary was pregnant with Jesus and blessed. Perhaps the baby leaping for joy was meant to be a sign.

What counts is what comes afterwards when Mary says her Magnificat, which is quiet a statement about God's justice and mercy in the world and choosing to exalt the humble and lowly, rather than the rich and powerful.

It must have been amazing for Mary to carry the child of God in her womb. The waiting for Emmanuel must have been profound. Like our waiting through advent for the birth of Jesus into our hearts and lives.

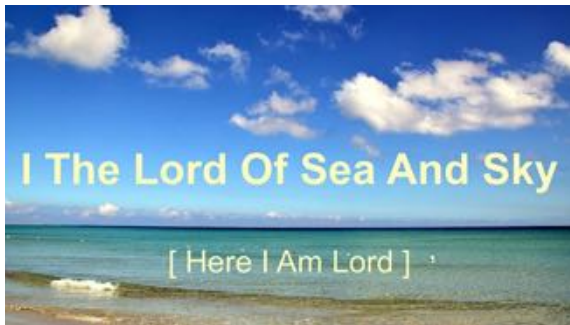
The obedience of faith of Mary would be steadfast, as is ours to God and our call.

Like Mary, we are invited to ponder on all that Mary encountered and her response. What is our response to the gospel and God's call? We can rejoice. The words from the Magnificat came from deep within Mary's soul.

She gives thanks to God who comes to those who know they need God. To us and those who love God.

Jesus comes to us and is born into our hearts.

Rev Tina



Hymn: I The Lord Of Sea And Sky
(Here I Am Lord) – Helen Jackson [4:24]

<https://youtu.be/2oK9xByJpyg>

*Music & Lyrics: Daniel L Schutte 1947– ; suggested by Isaiah 6;
© D. L. Schutte / Oregon Catholic Press; Permission to stream the
music obtained from ONE LICENSE #A-620587 [MUC]*

Video: © 2020 the Multimedia team. All Rights Reserved.

Posted to YouTube by Mountview Uniting Church.

Offering Prayer

about offering up ourselves and giving thanks to God for all we have

**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 And The Lord's Prayer

John Williams has prepared the Prayers of the people for you today

Today in the world cycle of prayers we focus on far east Asian nations of North and South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. These lands close the loop of our year-long cycle of prayers for the nations and peoples of the world.

In my three visits and period of residency in North Korea, I was unable to make any contact whatsoever with a Christian Church. My minders seemed to not understand who or what I was requesting.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea declares in its Constitution that it is a totally atheistic society. Former Buddhist temples are being carefully preserved as buildings but are firmly locked against use.

However, it is known that in the far north east of the land there are still tiny groups of private Christians, the remnants of the once active Presbyterian Church, banished there at the start of the Korean War as they were considered potential traitors. Due to old age, very few remain.

A prayer for these faithful souls in North Korea. "Dear Lord, despite frightening opposition, there are some who maintain a personal loving relationship with you. I cannot comprehend how they have been able to keep their faith – no gatherings for worship, copies of the Bible forbidden, persuading others to become Christian resulting in the penalty of death. Please wrap them in your love and maintain the hope that we all share that in death we will rejoice in your great glory. Amen."

South Korea has a strong Christian following, many from the active mission work of the Presbyterian Church stretching over 120 years. A former Minister-in-Association here, Rev. James Stuckey, and his wife Janie, being one such couple. A personal connection through my great aunt, Amy Beard, who was the first translator of the Scriptures into Korean; and with her husband Dr. David Watson, established hospitals, both of them spending a major part of their lives in that service. Now, the very strong Korean Presbyterian Church is in turn providing many personnel for active mission work across the world.

A prayer for South Korea. "I give thanks for the dedication and faithfulness of many who have taken to the millions of people in South Korea your Gospel of hope and the loving service which flows from it. May your church continue to grow as it reveals that message of hope and love to more and more and to be an influence for good to the whole nation. Amen."

Adjacent to the Korean peninsula is the crowded nation of Japan. About 90% of Japanese have an association with a religious belief, historically, Shinto and Buddhism. About 1.5% nominate Christianity as their faith, that is approaching 1.9 million in number. Many of the social customs of western society and with that Christian ethics have permeated Japanese culture.

A prayer for the people of Japan. "All embracing Lord, the people of Japan have made enormous changes to their cultural norms and their ethical outlook in the last two generations since the cessation of World War II. Their openness to at least hear your Gospel has seen large growth in the numbers who embrace your love. Grant conviction in the words of those who are spreading your Word across this nation. In your name, Amen."

Since casting off from the Chinese Peoples Republic in 1949, the island nation of Taiwan has lived with the constant threat of invasion by Chinese forces. Despite that, this nation has thrived. Religious freedom is paramount and practised by about 85% of the people spread across Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Folk faiths and Christianity. It is a relatively open, democratic and tolerant society with no recorded evidence of laws or social discrimination against members of the non-religious minority. In a population about the same number as Australia, there are approximately 1,600,000 practising Christians.

A prayer for Taiwan. "Loving Lord, whatever form of religious practice engaged by the people of Taiwan, they have one thing in common and that is hope for a future to be free to worship as they choose. For Christian followers, I ask that they have a future free from oppression and abuse. May they show love to all in the community and to go out to that community and visit the sick, to feed the hungry, to shelter and clothe the oppressed and to visit those who are imprisoned by fear. Amen."

Moving to local matters, the New Hope Baptist Church in Blackburn North has, like most local congregations, moved to on-line worship and fellowship groups.

A prayer for them. "I am thankful, Lord, that the people of the New Hope Baptist Church quickly adapted to the constraints required to combat the COVID virus. Now, as they prepare for a relaxation, may they grasp new opportunities for reaching out into the community to spread the message of your Gospel. May they show it, tell it and do it. In the name of Jesus, Amen."

A prayer for the Chaplain at St. Hilda's College, University of Melbourne. "The COVID virus has brought many difficult situations throughout this year, and the Chaplain has had a time of constant change and challenge. Dear Lord, please replenish the energy of the chaplaincy and enhance wisdom so that in 2021 she will be even better able to provide practical and spiritual service to the residents and staff of St. Hilda's College. Amen."

Prayers for the people of Mountview. "Thank you for the ministry of Rev Tina. Sharpen even more her discernment as she ministers to each one of our membership. Grant to her quiet sleep and good health. I thank and bless her for her weekly written words to us. May this Season of Advent bring to her an even deeper meaning for your coming and the hope brought to her and us all. Amen."

Be with Joyce Suto as she settles in to her new accommodation in Hobart to be at last near her family. There are some who are in special need, among them Jan Gerrand. She is progressing through a developmental series of chemo-like treatments which is quite debilitating. She is looking forward to having her family gather around her at Christmas. Please pray for Jan and husband, John, and others who you know.

A prayer for us all. "Great God of love. Our old world is sad and sorry through this dreadful COVID virus. I give thanks for the strong leadership which has enabled this community to resume a somewhat normal life. As a community, we are deeply grateful for the dedication of the front-line workers, constantly in great personal danger. Please gratify and bless them. I ask that the vaccines just being deployed are effective and lasting, and that others may soon follow and become available to everyone, rich and poor, "black" and "white", old and young. Please comfort the thousands and thousands of families who have lost a member to this pandemic. Please hold us all in your care. Amen."

Gracious Lord, on this day which completes our annual cycle of prayers for the peoples of this world, I give thanks that we are free to do just that.

May all of us across this world continue to support each other in prayer to you.
Grant to each of us your lasting peace. Amen.

The Lord's prayer. May you dig deep into your relationship with God to find an ever-deepening meaning within the Lord's Prayer as you say it quietly and deliberately.

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 in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours – now and for ever. Amen.

Blessing

We have heard the words of prophets
May we recognise God's truth
We have heard the words of angels
May we recognise God's joy
We have heard the words of promise
May we recognise God's love
May God bless us, mystery of creation, Child in the manger, Holy Spirit of glory,
and may we welcome and walk in the promises of God. Amen

Dismissal

Go out into the world in the power of the spirit and in all things at all times remember Christ is with you.
Make your life your worship to the praise and glory of God. Amen



Hymn: Shalom To You Now – Helen Jackson
[1:01]

<https://youtu.be/2oqiFenpWxY>

Music: Traditional Spanish melody; Public Domain.

Lyricist: Elise Shoemaker Eslinger;

© E. S. Eslinger / United Methodist Publishing; Lyrics

Reproduced (below) & Streamed by permission. CCLI Licence No.

122303 [MUC] Video: © 2020 the Multimedia team. All Rights

Reserved. Posted to YouTube by Mountview Uniting Church.

Shalom To You Now

Prayerfully read the words

Imagine your family in Christ and send them heartfelt blessings from the Lord

Shalom to you now,
shalom, my friends.
May God's full mercies
bless you, my friends.
In all your living and through your loving,
Christ be your shalom,
Christ be your shalom.

I have provided extra resources to accompany you on the journey. Rev Tina

Extra Worship Resources

Also, see the 'Advent Booklet' on pages 12-15

Being Human



Farewell to Joyce Suto

Heather, Colleen and I said farewell to Joyce on Tuesday. Joyce is flying to Tasmania on Thursday with her daughter Julie and granddaughter Rachel and is going to live in Tasmania. Heather presented Joyce with a card from the Mountview Congregation; Colleen with a pamper pack from Centre 81 and present; and I gave her chocolates. We prayed for Joyce and wished her every blessing on the next chapter of her adventures.

Please keep Joyce in your prayers as she settles into her new home.



Christmas can be a challenging time when people who have passed away are missed. If you know someone is grieving this time of the year and missing their loved one, reach out to them. Phone them up and listen to them.

<https://youtu.be/O2Kh1YSGQFM>

The above is the link to Mountview's Service of Hope (Blue Christmas 2020)

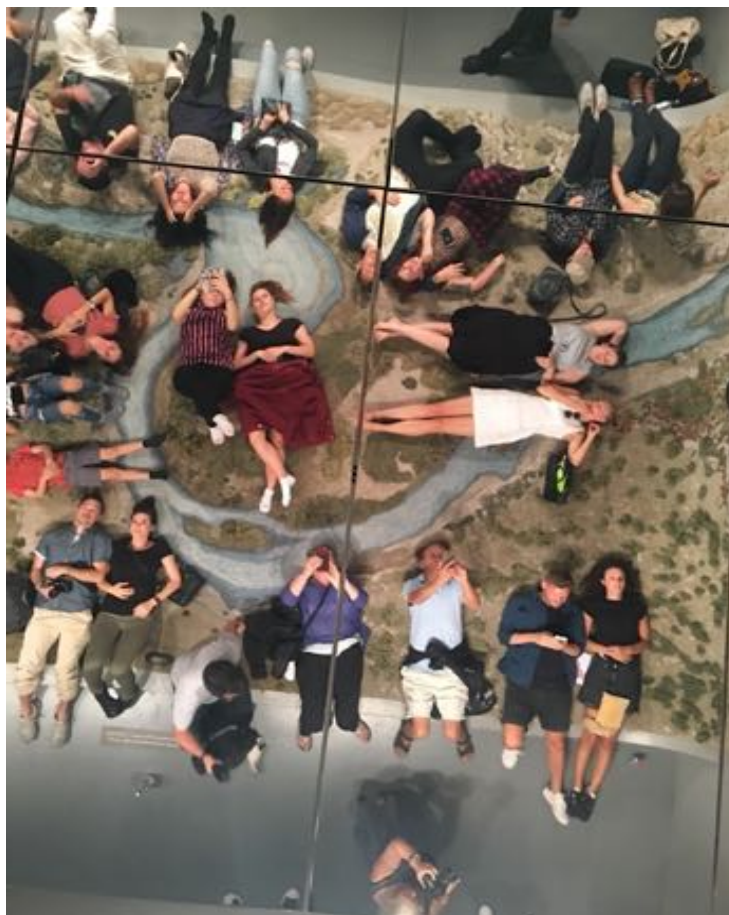
If you're finding things difficult, your invited to watch this YouTube. I hope it's a comfort for you.

Christians throughout the world have been invited to say the Lord's Prayer every day

Saying the Lord's Prayer is a good way of giving thanks and trusting in God

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is 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

Advent Booklet – Week Four – Love



This photo is of an exhibition at the National Art Gallery Melbourne, where you can see people and their loved ones reflected in the mirror on the roof.

Light a candle, if you have one

A Beginning

When the world began, God said Yes
 When Jesus came, God said Yes
 When we were born, God said Yes
 God said Yes to life and loving.

Prayer

This advent we pray for those who will travel
 We pray for those travelling through lockdowns and life
 We pray for people whose journeys are happy and hopeful
 We pray for those whose journeys are hard and dangerous
 We pray for people who make our journey's possible
 We pray for ourselves, that we may be ready to go where God calls us
 Amen

Brother Roger of Taize said love is a fire, in his book 'God Is Love Alone'

He said the following, which I've adapted:

God loves us before we love God. Loved with eternity's love, we sense that our response is above all to surrender ourselves. And so, our soul is filled with a thirst – to surrender everything to God.
'And our heart keeps on longing until it rests in God.'

Every human being yearns to love and be loved.

In the gift of our lives, God desires that both fire and spirit be made perceptible in us. God's love is a fire. However poor we may be, let us not quench the fire, let us not quench the Spirit.
And the humble trusting of faith is communicated like fire spreading from one person to the next.

God of all mercy, you found no other way to express to human beings that you came to earth as a humble person. And so, happy are we for loving Christ without having seen him. Amen

How do we nurture this fire of love within us?

A Poem

What makes a fire burn?
Is it the space between the logs,
A breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
Too many logs packed too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces
as much as to the wood.

When we are able to build open spaces
in the same way we have learned
to pile on the logs
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of fuel
together, that makes the fire possible
we need only to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way.



Leave spaces for God this Christmas.

Nurture the fire of the Spirit
within you by continuing the silent
time that came from lockdown.

Don't be tempted to fill every
moment of the day with activities.

Then the fire of love within you will
grow and bless all other aspects of
your life.

<< *Painting from Lindisfarne
Scriptorium by Mary Fleeson*

Elizabeth and Mary >>>



Advent Study – Week Four

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

7:1 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 7:2 the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." 7:3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

7:4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan:

7:5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?

7:6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. 7:7 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

7:8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; 7:9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 7:10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly 7:11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 7:16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

What do you make of this reading and the question in verse 7.5?

Where does God live?

I once heard a sermon called: How big is your God box? How do you know God?

As an image or presence or something else?

When people say God is love, what does this mean for you?

Luke 1: 26-38, 46b-55

1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

1:27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

1:28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

1:29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

1:30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

1:31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

1:32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

1:33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

1:34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

1:35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

1:36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

1:38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Then the angel departed from her.

Mary



1:46b "My soul magnifies the Lord, 1:47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 1:48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 1:49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 1:50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 1:51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 1:52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 1:53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 1:54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 1:55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

This is an amazing encounter. It is stylized in the same way as all servants of the Lord are called, such as in the Old Testament (Moses Exodus 3:1-12, Isaiah 6:1-13, Samuel 3:1-18), except that Mary is a woman.

An angel appears saying: Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.

Mary reacts, feeling perplexed and yet ponders on the words of the angel. The angel says: Do not be afraid. The angel then gives Mary a message from God about her call. She asks: How can this be? The angel explains. Then Mary says: Here I am, the servant of the Lord. What do you make of Mary's call and response? Not long afterwards Mary gives thanks to God in what's known as the Magnificat, the source of music and hymns. It is a powerful statement about God. What stands out for you? Do you think her statement is linked with Jesus statement in Luke 4:18-19? What do these two statements say about Luke's gospel?

Luke 4: 18-19

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

Reflections From Advent Study

We reflected on the question of: Where is God? One person considered that God cannot be contained in church buildings or Cathedrals built by labourers, who may have been living in poverty. What we do we do for God and this cannot be contained. God's presence is always there with us, before us, leading us, behind us, within us and around us. God is real. One person said family conversations as a child helped them understand God is not confined in a church building. God is everywhere and part of life and we don't need to see God's face. We look for the spark of God in people. We do not need a lot of words. We know God is in our hearts. We know this through how the Spirit moves our hearts. Another person knows God through looking up at mountains and remembering the question asked in psalm 121: Who will be my helper? They know God is above us and surrounds us and is our helper or will send a helper.

The story of Elizabeth being barren is like Sarah's story. Today many women give birth in their forties.

Women in the past began having babies at a young age. Perhaps forty was old for women.

Perhaps people didn't live long lives and many women died in childbirth. It was a different world.

The story of Elizabeth requires faith and a deeper understanding.

The story of Mary goes beyond our comprehension. One person reflected on how Nazareth was a small village near another city that had been destroyed by the Romans and this would have influenced Mary's Magnificat.

Another person reflected on Mary's great faith to take on this call to give birth to the Son of God.

One person said: It was too much of a leap of faith to connect Mary's Magnificat with Jesus statement about his call. Jesus lived amongst the poor and was poor like Mary. Both statements reflect this and the Beatitudes also reflect Jesus relationship with the poor.

Rev Tina, for Mountview Uniting Church

The following link is to the 'Worship' page on our website, from where other resources may be accessed:

<https://www.mountviewuca.org/worship.html>

Final collation by Mountview Multimedia team.

All protected content is reproduced with accreditation, with permission and or under the worship licenses held by Mountview Uniting Church in good faith. © 2020 Mountview Uniting Church. All Rights Reserved.

