



Gathering & Lighting the Candle

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light!*

We gather again, anticipating the inbreaking of light
into our world.

We light a candle because we know this great light
and tell the story of light coming into our world.

Call to worship

O sing to the Lord a new song,
sing to the Lord all the earth!

Those who lived in a world of deep darkness,
on them has the light shone.

*Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice
let the plains exult and the trees of the forest sing
for joy before the Lord who comes to us.*

May hope and love be reborn in you this night,
as you wonder again at the birth of Jesus Christ, our
Saviour.

Acknowledging

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional
custodians of this land and these waters. We pay
respect to elders past, present and emerging. As First
and Second Peoples walking together, we commit
ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening,
truth telling and seeking justice for all.



Singing: O little town (TiS 316)

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.

How silently, how silently
the Wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His Heaven.
No ear may hear His coming;
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive Him, still
the dear Christ enters in.

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in,
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
their Great Glad Tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord, Immanuel.

¹W: Phillips Brooks; M: Ralph Vaughan Williams



Weekly Worship. Christmas Eve 2021. Presbytery of Gippsland, Fig Tree Worship Resource



Prayer

On this Holy Night, we give thanks again for the immeasurable gift of our Saviour Jesus.

For the wonder of our faith stories and those who pointed to the good news amongst us...

For those in all times and places who have taken up the story of this night and lived differently because of it...

For those down the ages, who have borne witness to the Word who became flesh, which came to live in us...

For the grace and wonder of the blessings showered on us by the God who will not let us go, the God who will not give up on us, the One who pursues us eternally because we are the beloved...

For all these, O Lord, we give thanks.

It is with heavy hearts, then, that we come with sadness this night, to acknowledge that we have ignored such rich blessings.

We confess that we have considered our human ways to be superior and more life-giving than the ways of the Kingdom.

Forgive us, O God, for our foolishness, our ignorance, and our wilfulness in pursuing our own agendas at the expense of soul things, the things of most significance.

Forgive us, O God, for our neglect of other people, our wrong words and deeds, the encouraging words we have left unsaid, the empowering deeds we have not done. What fools we are!

We allow ourselves to be so easily distracted from what gives us life.

Forgive us, we pray, and make us over, so that we can start afresh...

Jesus said: To all who come to me with heavy burdens, I will give you rest.

Jesus said to all who fear vengeance from an angry God, that God is love.

Jesus said that all we need to do to repent is to express sincere sorrow for our sins, and to want, honestly, to walk in the ways of the Kingdom.

If we do this, we can be assured that our sins are forgiven. And, for this we say:

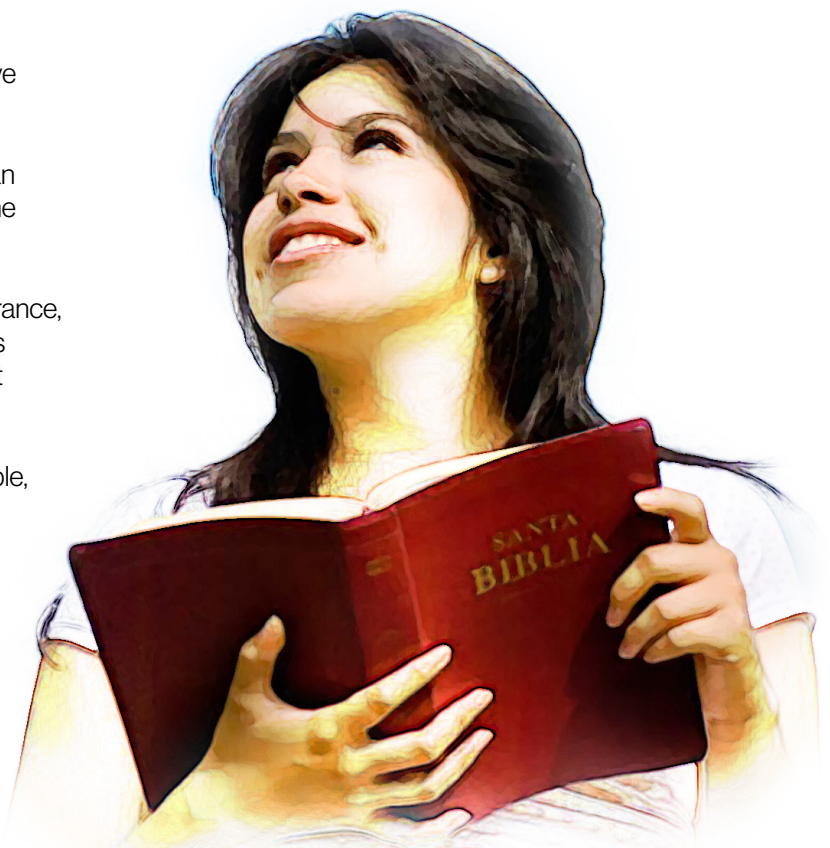
Thanks be to God! Amen.

Listening

Read: Luke 2:1-14

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:

Thanks be to God.





Reflecting Rev. Moira Dodsworth

Luke's gospel makes sure we know that the good news of Christ's birth is true. It does this by starting the story firmly with a when and where, historical and geographical information. The decree had gone out for a census by Caesar Augustus, and so Joseph travels with his pregnant bride to Bethlehem, the city of David. There Mary is to have her child, which will also fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament for the Messiah's heritage and place of birth. The scene is set.

Unfortunately, the little family cannot find a place to stay and eventually shelter at the back of an inn where the animals are kept, and a manger provides the bed for the baby. This is a story of contrasts. We begin with the emperor, Caesar Augustus who is safe in his palace, a place of wealth and power but the Messiah is born, sheltering where the animals were kept, a humble place. This king, the one who is to save the people does not need the pomp and ceremony of earthly power; God's message is different.

In that region, there were shepherds living in the fields (v8). An ordinary night, some shepherds doing their job. Yet David was a shepherd and God is the shepherd to God's flock, so not inappropriate people to hear the message. The shepherds were terrified by the arrival of the angel and a great light, the glory of the Lord. They are reassured - Do not be afraid - and told the Good News. Again the contrast - great fear to excitement, the shepherds head off, in haste, believing that this is God's word to them and they want to know more, and to see the baby who is the Saviour. Heaven and earth meet, not in a palace, a place of comfort but in a field and a comfortless room.

God does not need magnificent buildings or people with great talents. The message comes in all sorts of places to those who are ready to hear and willing to go and find out more. The shepherds could have run away, ignored what happened, scoffed and said "what can a baby do?" But they didn't; they found Mary and Joseph and the baby, in a town overflowing

with people come for the census, and then shared what they had learnt about the child. They believed this surprising, unbelievable story and were so excited they had to tell others - and their telling must have been convincing because others were amazed. We hear the story year after year. May this be the year that we are amazed and share the story so others are amazed.

The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God.

Mary treasures all the words and ponders them in her heart. An angel gave Mary the good news of the baby, Elizabeth affirmed the good news of who the child was, and now the shepherds. Those in power don't recognise the good news; it is not what they want to hear, nor do many in the world as it contrasts with good news of economic success, power and riches. The good news is the coming of The Messiah, a servant king who brings comfort to those who need it, a story of love and service that turns worldly expectations upside down. Treasure the good news in your heart, go glorifying and praising God and share what you have heard.





Responding: Prayers for the World and Community

O God, on this Holy Night we pray for our world.

For all who work to promote good and to engender hope, for all who fear that nothing will change as you want, for all who feel that whatever they do or say, they will be excluded.

May the God of hope bring fresh courage to those in circumstances of neglect, homelessness, imprisonment and loneliness. May they know your guidance and the warmth of your presence.

May the God of comfort give encouragement to those who greatly miss lost loved ones, or who cannot move on after a sudden death, for those who have been betrayed and whose hopes have been shattered. For all these, bring the seeds of new life.

May the God of healing bring hope to those who are ill, those who have suffered accidents and those who have suffered trauma.

May the God of peace bring resolution and restoration amidst the conflicts of the world – between countries, between people and ethnic groups and in families and amongst individuals. May the Holy Spirit bring softness and recognition of others' humanity.

May the God of love bring healing to relationships and give new meaning in decayed hopes. For those who are part of families, but feel they don't belong or fit in. For those who long to be part of a family, but have no family they can call their own, or whose family has disowned them. For those who dread this time of the year, when family members who don't normally mix and who don't get on, come together in tenseness and a lack of love.

May the God of grace bless those for whom Christmas brings bad or unwelcome memories. Heal and transform these days and moments, that they may come to know that you have the last word on all that is ugly. In you, this night, new life is born.

Loving God, be with us all as the Christ Child we need this Christmas. We pray for ourselves and our families and friends. Inspire us to know anew the wonder of your coming to us, O Emmanuel. 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.**

Passing the peace

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





Weekly Worship

Christmas Eve
Friday December 24, 2021

Singing: Away in a manger TiS 318

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

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

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

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

From manger to market place, Jesus come near
and whisper your wonder to our waiting ears.
Bring healing and freedom,
bring hope and release
so all of creation can breathe in your peace.

2W: Rev. Jennie Gordon (V1 anon); M: W Kirkpatrick arr. L Bartlett

Blessing

Go out with great joy to share the good news of
Christ's birth, giving witness to all you have seen and
heard.

May the blessing of the Father give you hope,
the blessing of Jesus shine on your journey,
and the blessing of the Holy Spirit enrich your heart.

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