



Call to Worship & Lighting the Candle

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, the delight of my soul;
**I have set my Spirit upon my servant
who will bring forth justice to the nations.**
The One who created the heavens and stretched
them out,
who spread out the earth and her progeny,
**who gives breath to the people upon her,
and spirit to those who walk in her.**

(as the candle is lit)

The gift of God amongst us,
the gifts from the travellers,
the gift of peace given to us.
**We are the gift of God among others,
we hold the gifts to share,
we bring peace to all in what we do.**

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: Who is the baby? TiS 325

OR **TiS 281** *When God almighty came to be
one of us*



Prayer

Come to us, Mother of the ages,
weave us into faith.
Come to us, Wisdom in humanity,
spin us into freedom.

**Come to us, Nurturer of community,
stitch us into your tapestry of life,
that we may know the colour of hope,
and experience the texture of grace,
and celebrate the fabric of wholeness
in the mystery of your creativity. Amen.**

Singing: Earth has many a noble city TiS 291

OR **TiS 307** *The Virgin Mary had a baby boy*



Passing the peace

As 2023 unfolds,
may the peace of the Son of Woman
guide and direct you mind, body and soul
in ways of wisdom and compassion.
and also with you.





Affirmation of faith

We affirm the promises made in our baptism and say ...

We are not alone; we live in God's world.

We believe in God
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church,
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope,
in life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Listening

Read: Isaiah 60:1-6
Matthew 2:1-12

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word:

Thanks be to God.

Reflecting:

Rev. Arnie Wierenga

Looking upwards and gazing on the night sky always fills me with awe. I delight in the brilliance of the Milky Way and keep an eye on the waxing and waning of the moon. I'm fortunate to live in a place of vivid sunrises and sunsets and their inspiration connects me with our creator God.

As the journey of the wise men from the East is told in Matthew's gospel I can identify with their star-gazing wonder. I suspect though, that as the birth narrative is repeated year upon year, the details of the story of God with us are so embellished that we hear something very different to the gospel account.

I've wondered before about these travellers from the East. Matthew describes them as wise men but they seem foolish in their encounter with Herod. They risk the very life of Jesus and put the lives of all children in the Judean kingdom at risk. They don't seem wise when it comes to power and the insecurity of King Herod.

The wise men or magi are not kings as we often imagine. They are Persian astrologers, in search of meaning from the star they chase. It is likely that early Jewish hearers of this story would have considered them foolish as well. Perhaps Matthew's descriptor of 'wise' is some form of parody or comedy.

Things move quickly at this time of year in our church calendar. While we are still glowing from Christmas festivities, today marks the beginning of the season of the Epiphany. Jesus has already grown up, at least a little. We encounter him as a child in this text and soon he and his family will become refugees in Egypt, fleeing Herod's wrath.

The church uses the word Epiphany to discover who Jesus is. The story of magi and the clash of powers is part of that. We might ask who is it that Herod is afraid of? What kind of power or kingship does or will this rival bring? What difference does all that make for us? The image of light is important as we think of these things. In popular usage we speak of having an Epiphany as a 'light-bulb' moment, a moment of realisation as though someone has turned on the light. Epiphany is like the curtains being drawn to let in the light. The light reveals who Jesus is and how he is God dwelling with us. As the star shines its light to help locate the light of the world for the magi, so we are drawn to the light and how it shines among us.

Reflecting continues

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Reflecting continues

There are links here to Isaiah 60. The prophet also uses imagery of light and calls Israel to live into her calling and shine. The prophet urges the people to bear witness to the graciousness and goodness of God. Arise, shine, share the light that you have experienced, all that comes from God!

So, who is this one who comes to us from God? Who is it that takes on flesh to live among us? How is it that one can be born in such a vulnerable and 'unkingly' kind of way and yet be the one proclaimed as ruler to shepherd Israel?

We see the light emerging already in the life of this child. The foolish or wise travellers from the East are part of his story and they bring the world of foreigners into what was almost exclusively a Jewish story. Their recognition of Jesus and offering homage and gifts opens up the good news to the whole world. That means we all get an opportunity to see the light of God breaking into our lives.

Isaiah speaks of bearing witness to the graciousness and goodness of God. What is it of God revealed in Jesus Christ that has brought light and life to you?

I know that as others have shared the light of Christ with me, it has lifted, healed and renewed me in the hope and promises of God. That then becomes light that can be shared as good news in other ways.

As God is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, may we find the courage to lift the light of the world for all to see.

Singing: We are marching **TiS 666**

OR **TiS 314** *As with gladness men of old*



Offering

God is among us, God lives in all created things. May we who gather to worship work to be the visible God through all we do, say and give.

Bless our giving so it may be given to those who struggle to see God in the world around them.

Notices

January 4th is World Braille Day. On January 8th many churches celebrate the Baptism of Jesus.

Responding: Prayers for World & Community

We pray:

For the First Peoples of this land
and their ways of belonging in this place;

For the many who have come to these shores
seeking refuge and asylum;

For the land, vast and immense,
for the diversity of all that makes their home on and
with the land;

For the people in Ukraine and in Russia who face yet
another bleak and war-torn festive period;

For folks devastated by flood across these lands now
called Australia who face unending trauma and pain.

For all who struggle at this time of year,
for whom a meal, or a home is beyond imagination;

For all who are unwell in mind and body;
for all who grieve for those living and those who
have died;

For all who are preparing to meet for the World Pride
Festival in Sydney in February 2023. May World Pride
bring new ways to flourish in one's identity, God's
identity;

Prayer continues

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Prayer continues

Hear our prayers, Loving Source,
in the name of Jesus Christ
who prays with us and for us and to whom be praise
forever. 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**

Singing: Joy in the bush

Tune from **TiS 268**
Words Amelia Koh Butler, 2022

Joy in the bush the magpies sing
As earth receives her king
Let Christmas bush grow tall for him
Let Christmas bells be rung for him
And sky and bushland sing
And sky and bushland sing
And sky, and sky and bushland sing

Joy at the beach, life saviour's crown
Revives and rescues all
Let tides and oceans rise to him
Let grains of sand count time for him
Let crashing waves bow down
Let crashing waves bow down
Let crashing, let crashing waves bow down

Joy in our hearts, God's love and grace
Restores us to new life
Let every soul rejoice in him
Let every language pray to him
And look upon God's face
And look upon God's face
And look, and look upon God's face

OR **TiS 417** Loving Spirit

Blessing

May the God of Wisdom
who comforted all the people of the Scriptures
and who cares for us as God's own
be with you, today and evermore.

Go as people of peace,
stewards and healers of creation,
consolers of the afflicted,
and midwives of justice.
And as this service has ended, may the service now
begin. Amen.

Contributors this week:

Liturgy: Rev. Deacon Marian Bisset.

Reflection: Rev. Arnie Wierenga.

Presbytery of Gippsland
Editor: Rev. Arnie Wierenga
pastoral.ucagipps@gmail.com

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