



Weekly Worship



First Sunday after Christmas
Sunday December 31, 2023

Call to Worship & Lighting the Candle

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

(from Psalm 148)

Come, let us worship God.

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

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.



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

Singing: Unto us a boy is born TiS 293

OR: Hark! The herald angels sing TiS 303

OR: Let earth and heaven combine TiS 305



Prayer

Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps.
Praise the Lord, young men and women alike,
old and young together. *(from Ps 148)*

We offer thanks for the ending of this year
anticipating another to come. We wonder at all that
has happened these past twelve months and of your
journey among us.

We confess it's been a troubling year. It's been hard
to focus on joy so we confess our despair due to the
troubles of the world.

We hear in Hebrews 2 that salvation is made perfect
through sufferings, yet the sufferings of this year
seem too much, too deep, too confronting - and we
want relief from it all.

Will you send angels to guide the innocent caught in
the crossfire of war? Will you care for refugees who
flee again to Egypt and many other places?

Like Rachel we lament, we weep, we need hope...

From the Scriptures we hear that those who have
suffered are able to help others who are troubled.
We remember that Jesus returned from exile and
faced suffering; that he understands our lament, our
confusion, our despair.

In him, through him, because of him, we find our
restoration and a place for new hope to be found.
Christ is our light, our life, our salvation.

Come to us Jesus, crawl in beside all who are
troubled and pitch your tent to dwell among us.
Amen.



Weekly Worship, Christmas 2023, Presbytery of Gippsland, Fig Tree Worship Resource



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



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Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Is 61:10–62:3
Lk 2:22-40

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word
Thanks be to God.

Reflecting Rev. Ian Brown

'A light to help us see'

Between 600 and 900 C.E., Chinese alchemists mixed saltpetre with sulphur and charcoal. They had stumbled on the crude recipe for gunpowder and their creation went off with a bang. This "fire drug" as they called it, became an integral part of Chinese culture. China carefully guarded their secret, but it is known that Arabs were using gunpowder against the crusaders in the twelfth century.

There are all manner of legends about the development and use of fire works. From early notions of warding off evil spirits, to the use of tons of the stuff now, to mark New Years celebrations, we seem to be fascinated with bright lights. Hundreds of thousands of us go to watch the sky lit up in colours and patterns, all around our country – and millions do the same around our world. New Year's eve wouldn't be the same without it! That's a big impact from one small recipe.

In Isaiah, hope and encouragement for their return from exile is expressed in terms of light too.

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,...
until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and
her salvation like a burning torch."

Earlier, chapter 60 has:

"The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor
for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light."

Light is vital for seeing. The Bible is full of such imagery. From John's gospel;

'What has come into being in him was life, and the
life was the light of all people. The light shines in
the darkness.'

For a couple of folk well advanced in years, my guess is that Anna and Simeon needed a good deal of light to recognise Jesus. I think it's probable that if Jesus had living grandparents, this is the kind of story they would have told with a wry smile on their faces. And if they were like grandparents through the ages, the story might have grown with the telling. They might have been tempted to gloss over the content of this old pairs' message though.

We don't know anything about this trip by the young family to Jerusalem, except that they went to present their first-born son. Our writer, Luke, is very concerned with these religious details. He hadn't read Matthew, who has a flight to Egypt happening here.

Luke tells us that the infant Jesus was given a somewhat frightening welcome at the Temple. The welcome in this case came from two older 'holy ones', in the Temple. They have a mystic, prayerful way of looking at and telling the truth as they see it. In a sense, Simeon picks up the role of Isaiah, proclaiming new reality, in the hope of a baby.

'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me
with the garments of salvation.'

Simeon and Anna knew these words well. They are true saints of Israel. They both moved and lived in the Spirit of these words of hope. But it's worth noting their age. Luke reflects a culture of honouring wise mature people. They were probably frail, but the story shows they are rich sources of wisdom and insight. And good models for us!

Simeon was expectant, he was sensitive to God and so when this couple appear to present their son, Simeon takes Jesus in his arms and presents all who will hear with the most extraordinary message;

Reflecting continues

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Reflecting continues

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a **light for revelation** to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

It was such a beautiful acclamation that the early church turned it into a song, which is still sung today. And it's not just a lovely song, this is revelation - the presentation of God's truth; truth long expected, here seen and proclaimed. Here in front of these frail folk, was the long awaited one, a light for all peoples. Like the gunpowder; small thing, big impact!

But the news was not all rosy. This bright light would also cause shadows. There would be opposition, trouble and pain - he would force choices and expose evil. Mary's soul would be pierced too, she is told. And while Mary is still reeling from this, Anna, the old prophetess, chimes in praising God for this baby boy. The presents for Jesus' parents in that first season of Christmas were a very mixed bag.

Wherever Jesus arrives, even as an infant there is both wonderful promise, joy, hope - and an unsettling disturbance. We too have seen something that is still unfolding, it's a beginning we are still a part of.

So, inspired by this Christmas season, we might try to be sensitive to the resources of wisdom we have in the experience around us and in us! And we might look for those elements of promise and joy, and like Simeon and Anna, name them in public and celebrate them. We might look for where the light of Jesus coming shows truth for us today; we might even be part of some of that truth, in what we do, following what Anna and Simeon did:

"for my own eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light of revelation."

Is it by our own cleverness we are to achieve the sharing of God's good news? No, says Isaiah, it will happen as naturally 'as the earth brings forth its shoots'.

Perhaps like Anna and Simeon we might be some small part of a new beginning of hope for all. Amen.

Singing: Lord, bid your servant **TiS 324**

OR: Love came down at Christmas TiS 317

OR: Child in the manger TiS 319



Offering

God of the ages, we recall that when the ancients were distressed, it was no messenger or angel but your very presence that saved them. As you redeemed those of old, your reaching out with love and grace touches people anew today. Bless what we offer in your name, that it may bless many with your life-giving presence.

Responding: Prayers for World & Community

As this year draws to a close, gracious God, we pray for a world that has suffered greatly through 2023.

- Places of war...
- Places impacted by natural disasters ...
- Places impacted by the greed and arrogance of those who wield power ...

Prayer continues

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Prayer continues

We pray for those who struggle within our own country:

- ✞ First Nations people and the ongoing struggle from the Voice referendum ...
- ✞ those who mistrust leaders because of broken promises or abuses of power ...
- ✞ those who struggle to make ends meet or find themselves without a roof over their head...

We pray for our church

- ✞ in the challenges of the past year
- ✞ for the hope we find in God incarnate, God dwelling with us

We pray together then as Jesus taught us:

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: Born in the night TiS 323

OR: *The Aye Carol* TiS 325

Blessing

Whatever challenges to come,
God promises to be among us.
For those who find distress,
God comes to lift and carry.
Regardless of troubles this past year,
God invites us towards hope and life
in what is to come.

Go to bless and be blessed
in the name of God:

Creator,
Redeemer,
and Sustainer. Amen.

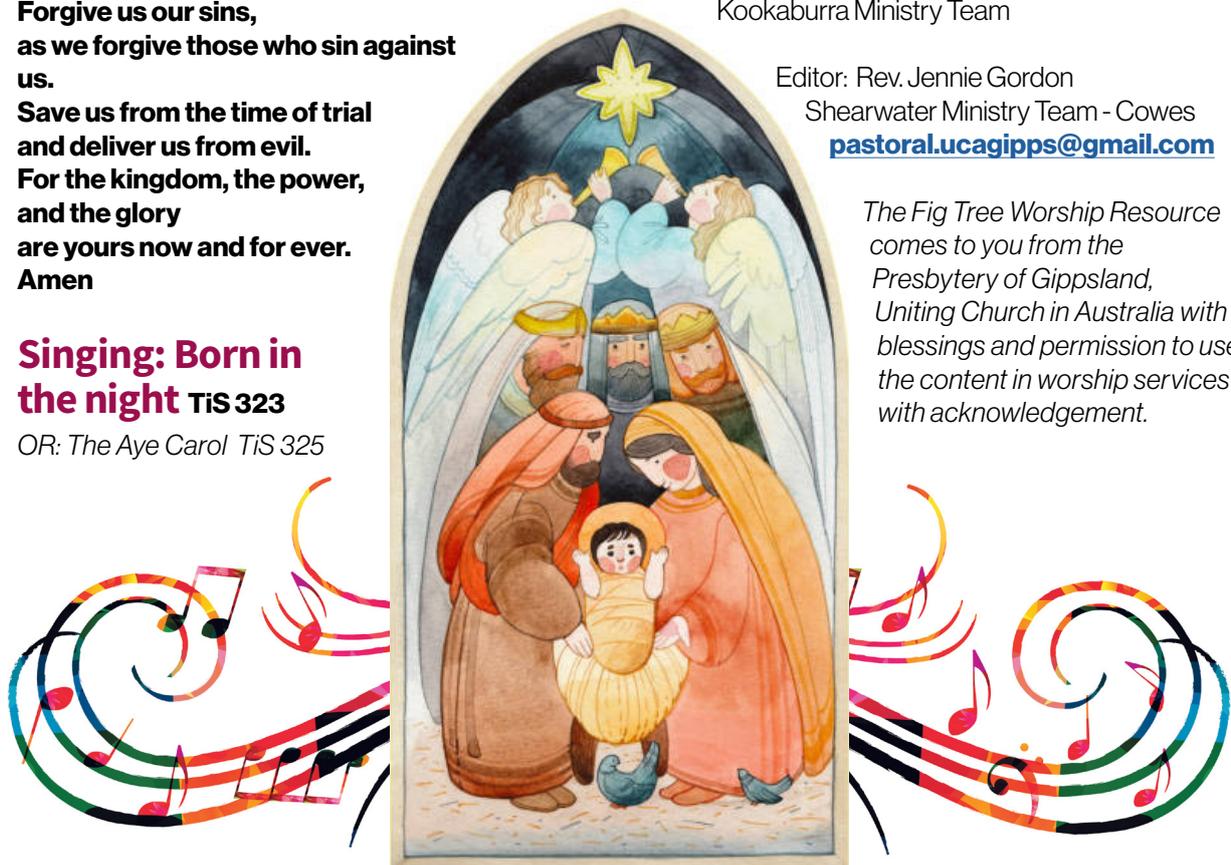
Contributors this week:

Reflection: Rev. Ian Brown
Wattlebird Ministry Team - Warragul

Liturgy: Rev. Arnie Wierenga
Leongatha, Korumburra, Loch-Poowong
Kookaburra Ministry Team

Editor: Rev. Jennie Gordon
Shearwater Ministry Team - Cowes
pastoral.ucagipps@gmail.com

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