



Advent 3 - Sunday December 17th, 2023

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

We are using the **Watery Advent Wreath Liturgy** through Advent. For an explanation please see *The Fig Tree Resource for Advent 1*. If you would like to use candles you can find some liturgies online and here: <https://uniting.church/engage-together-advent-resource-out-now/>

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

One: The Spirit is here

All: **God's joy is with us**

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.

Singing - Joyful, joyful, TiS 152

OR: come o God of all the earth TiS 181



Prayer

One: As we pour the water for our Advent wreath we remember our deep thirst for God's joy.

ALL: We long for your joy, O God

One: Joy that soaks into us and makes our world stand still, like a sudden summer downpour.

ALL: We long for your joy, O God

One: Joy that makes our soul dance like kids under a sprinkler on the lawn.

ALL: We long for your joy, O God

One: Joy that becomes the centre of our life with others like the water boiling in the kettle for a cuppa with friends.

ALL: We long for your joy, O God

One: You are invited to name people and places that are in particular need of God's joy at this time (*some examples follow*,):

People spending Christmas far away from loved ones

People feeling pressure to buy expensive presents

*People living with mental health problems,
especially depression*

People around the world

suffering the effects of disasters

People facing the possibility

of losing their homes or farmland

People living in isolation

*People living with the loss of their abilities
and independence*

*People struggling to be faithful in difficult
circumstances*

One: Advent God, we worship you with joy.

ALL: We long for your joy, O God, Amen.

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 (responsive)

Rejoice always,
pray without ceasing,

give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise the words of prophets,
but test everything;

hold fast to what is good;
abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace sanctify you entirely;
*and may your spirit and soul and body
be kept sound and blameless
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The One who calls you is faithful,
and they will do this.



Prayer

O God, hear our prayer:

In the middle of our muddle,
we struggle to be joyful,
we forget to be thankful,
we don't make time for prayer,

In the noise of our days
we ignore the prophet's cry,
we reject the call for justice,
we tune our ears for easy listening.

Forgive our selfish and stubborn hearts
and open us to your joy.

A joy that flows from hope.

A joy that leans into life.

A joy that reaches out with love.

In the quiet we bring
those burdens of regret
that weigh us down;

(time for quiet)

Siblings in Christ,
be assured;
the one who calls you is faithful,
and they will do this.

We are released from that heavy load
as disciples who are the body of Christ together.
We are forgiven
and set free to live in joy,
Thanks be to God, Amen.

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Luke 1:46b-55

John 1:6-8, 19-28

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

Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga

Mary sings with joy, and I can't help but be excited!

But it hardly makes any sense. We don't need to look far to see the troubles of the world. People who are poor, lowly or hungry suffer more than ever. It's heartbreaking to hear of babies who have no living relatives in Gaza and therefore cannot be identified.

How can hope be strong when the evidence suggests otherwise? How can light shine when the darkness overwhelms?

Mary sings with joy because she sees that God has looked upon her with favour. It's bold to say that all generations thereon will call her blessed, but in this space she recognises that God has anointed and blessed her, and joined her to the story of God's salvation. She is right as well, for we do consider her to be God's instrument of blessing. What is interesting is that in her song, she sings as though salvation has already come. It is as though in seeing God lifting her up, she can see that God lifts all who are poor or hungry and has scattered powerful oppressors. It is the kind of hope and reversal I long for. I want the outrageous conviction and confidence that Mary has at this moment. I thirst for God's love and hope for the world.

History suggests that oppression fuels hope, that the thirst for justice compels people to give everything, even their very lives, towards God's reversal. It also suggests the most powerful form of hope comes through acts of love. People with hope are the most powerful force the world knows. Governments throughout history have feared this power.

I'm reminded of the first Easter in Ukraine in the current war against Russian invading forces. Despite the risk of staying and

many urging them to leave, some Orthodox priests remained in towns and villages under fire. Amidst the shells of ancient bombed out churches, the



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risen Lord was proclaimed. Holy Communion was offered to the gathered community – people without food and water, many homeless, grieving, and anxious about tomorrow. The bread was broken and the cup shared – the bread of life and the cup of salvation. It is a claim to Mary's hope, to the power of life over death, to salvation.

Jesus reminds us that when one suffers, we all suffer. Our faith may become domesticated when we are complacent or overly comfortable, but Easter in Ukraine reminds us that faith is not safe or convenient, but one where life and hope comes despite all that is broken. Safe religion does not inspire or move a people. Mary does not play it safe. Instead, she takes a bold step into the salvation of God. Jesus wasn't safe either. It cost him his life, but if he'd stayed safe, we would not know the power of God revealed in the risen Christ.

Every Thursday, women of the Plaza de Mayo gather there in Buenos Aires. They wear white scarves and have banners with names of the 30,000 people who *disappeared* in the mid 70s in a period dubbed the 'Dirty war'. They gather boldly to protest what is dark and hidden. They have done so at risk of disappearing themselves. Their fight for justice has led to nearly 900 of the powerful military junta being convicted of crimes. They continue to gather to lift the lowly, to ensure light shines in the darkness.

Mary claims a reversal for those poor and hungry, she speaks up for those disappeared. As I get caught up in her joy, it calls me to let go of what is safe and secure and boldly step into salvation. I think that means to live with the courage and conviction of the women of the Plaza de Mayo – to partake of the bread and the cup, to be hands and feet, to be a member of the living body of Jesus Christ.

Singing - This day God gives me TiS 642 - **try the tune BUNESSAN**

OR: O Christ the healer, we have come TiS 638 - can be sung to TALLIS' CANON

Offering

Joy-bearer God, we bring these gifts in hope, asking that you bless them. Bless them and bless us, so that together we may sow seeds of joy and grow harvests of love in the garden of your grace. Amen.

Notices

A message about the Christmas Bowl Appeal;

So much of our preparation for Christmas is about remembering all the things we have to do to ensure our celebrations go smoothly. In the midst of all our planning and preparation it can be easy to forget the needs of the most vulnerable in our world including refugees. I encourage you to pause and reflect on the birth of Jesus' light in the darkest of places, enfleshment of God's loving remembrance of humanity, and on the story of Jesus the refugee who flees with his family because of political instability and persecution. As you open your heart again to Jesus coming amongst us I hope you also open your heart to refugees in the world today and remember them in your prayers and giving by supporting the Christmas Bowl.

Rev. Sharon Hollis,
President, Uniting Church in Australia
<https://christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au/>

Prayers for World & Community

one among you

Based on John 1:6-8; 19-28

all your longings will be met
but still, you do not know him yet

all the years of tears and aching
hoping, sleeping, dreaming, waking,
have brought you to this place
but you don't recognise his face

one among you speaks your name
walks the road by which you came



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knows the fear you try to hide
sees the light you lock inside

and his presence will be known
when his love is fully shown.

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Dad & Daughter, prayers and poems on the Gospel

God who births love amongst us,
hear our prayers for your world;

Bless the ones whose lives have been
devastated by war.

Bless all who live in fear.

Bless the ones who approach the coming
weeks with heavy sadness and loneliness.

Bless the ones who have lost hope and
struggle with keeping on living.

Bless the earth.
Bless the creatures.
Bless the trees and flowers and seeds of life.

Bless all families, large and small.
Bless us all.

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 forever. Amen.

Singing - Holy Spirit, go before us. TiS 420

OR: *On Jordan's Bank* TiS 270

Blessing - from 1 Thessalonians

Rejoice always.

Pray without ceasing.

Give thanks in all circumstances.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise the words of prophets.

Hold fast to what is good.

May the God of peace fill you up
Spirit and Soul and Body.

The holy One-in-Three
and Three-in-One is faithful,
and they will do this.

And all the people say: **Amen.**

Watery Advent Blessing Song

Tune: *NOEL NOUVELET* TiS 665

Living water flowing,
'cross the dusty plains
thirsty landscapes bursting
with new life again.

Come, Jesus, come and
quench our longing too.
Let the joy of Advent,
flow through us, from you.

Watery Advent Wreath:

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