



Christmas Day, 2023

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

We have been 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/>

A note on singing today: fill your worship with Christmas carols! There are so many songs that people love to sing. Also, be aware of the current desperate conflict in the places that are mentioned in many of these songs, you may want to preface the singing with a pause, a prayer, or simply an acknowledgement of the situation.

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

One: The Spirit is here
All: **God's hope, peace, joy and love are with us**

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

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.

Welcome to everyone, if you come here all the time, or wander in and out, if you come here regularly at Christmas and Easter, or if you've just come for the first time.

Welcome if you're using this resource at home, or with a few friends. **Welcome to our joyful celebration of the birth of Jesus.**

Singing - Joy to the world TiS 268

OR: O come, all ye faithful TiS 304



Prayer

You might want to use the baptismal font as the final vessel for our Watery Advent Wreath.

One: As we pour the water
to complete our wreath,
we celebrate the coming of Jesus.
We remember the one who came
by water and blood,
the one who cried for his dead friend, the
one who was thirsty
and asked a woman for a drink.

ALL: We thank you for coming as one of us.

One: We remember the one
who walked on water,
the one who calmed the waves,
the one who turned water into wine.

**ALL: We thank you for coming
as one unlike anyone else.**

L: We remember the one
who is living water for us here and now.

**ALL: We thank you
because our thirst for God
is quenched in you. Amen.**



Prayer

All is done, for the moment;
gifts wrapped, or unwrapped,
food cooked, or still to prepare,
cards to write, journeys to make...
All done, for now, for this holy time of worship.
put it all aside.

Open your hands
and rest them facing upwards in your lap
like a cradle

Be still, and know that a child was born,
thousands of years ago,
and that child still shows us the face of love.



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Be still,
and know that your flesh cradles
that very same love.

Be still.

Hold a generous time of stillness

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Luke 2:1-20

For these words of faith and for Jesus the Word

Thanks be to God.

Reflecting - Rev. Arnie Wierenga

A few weeks ago, a banner was hung in my local church that says, "Get ready for God to change the world". As I said this phrase aloud in worship, someone responded with a sense of despair, "I sure hope it happens".

On this day of days, I wonder if you share something of this longing? If so, you are not alone; the story of Jesus' birth is set amongst tyranny and helplessness. In those days, a decree came from the world of power to go back to where you came from. It's time to be counted. It's not great timing for Mary who is heavy and expectant with child. But go they must, to the city of Kings, their city, David's city, Bethlehem. And we sense a struggle for power is brewing.

Things don't seem to be working out for Joseph and Mary. We hear there was no room at the inn and perhaps imagine that all the fancy accommodation was booked out. But it's not quite that glamorous. The inn was likely no better than a shanty, something knocked together to give basic cover as overflow. A carport would be overstating what the inn would have been. And already the 'carport' is full.

The conditions are at best basic and simple. Our new couple could likely ill afford the cost of an air BnB. Welcome to the city of kings, young ones. And don't get too romantic about

what the manger either. It's just a trough, probably carved out of stone, a place to put the feed for the animals. It's hardly the most hygienic place to lay your newborn. But desperate times ...

If we sensed a clash of powers, the contrast deepens. Jesus is born into a world under the dark cloud of *pax romana*. This is a world where power was used in a brutal way to quell any uprisings. It is a world where the emperor is given the title 'son of God' to legitimise the regime. It is a world where the powerful suck the life out of the vulnerable. It is a world where the mighty live in luxury and know feasting and pleasure while the poor suffer. Into this world Jesus is born. In poverty, amidst the animals, with no place to call home.

Luke sets the scene for a subversion of normal powers. "I sure hope it happens!", that God can change the world. Like my friend, I hope it happens as well. But I believe it has happened and is happening too.

Jesus will live a life poured out for others. Jesus' rule will be known as counter-cultural, a crown not of precious stones and metals, but one of thorns. Even the greatest of Roman threats, crucifixion, will not stop his unusual power – that of God's love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, salvation. God breaks into our world in flesh and bone. And Jesus brings hope to those who need it; restores dignity to those discarded.

We are sometimes like shepherds out in the dark, in isolated places, needing to hear a spark of hope or renewal. Sometimes we need to look to the heavens to be surprised by the divine. For me that happens literally, seeing a shooting star or the great milky mass of stars at night. It also comes in the witness of new life. God breaks into our world and Jesus becomes God's fleshy, vulnerable, living, breathing, crying presence. How many times has the miracle of life sparked a new hope and wonder in us? How many times have angels (in whatever shape or form) come to us with a word or song that has sparked hope and restored us to life?



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Powers still come and take what is not theirs. They still oppress the most vulnerable. But right alongside them is the vulnerable inbreaking of God. When we or those we love struggle, God knows what it is like. When people far away are decimated by brutal forces, God has crept in alongside them and pitched a tent and dwells among them.

Mary ponders the things happening to her. She has already known the spark that caused her to sing with joy. May her song become our song. That God can and does change the world.

Singing - Away in a manger Tis 318

- *Some alternate words after v1:*

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 blessing 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 marketplace, 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.

Words; Jennie Gordon

Permission to use in worship with acknowledgement

OR: Silent Night Tis 311

Notices

You may want to include one of the stories in the Christmas Bowl resource from Act For Peace.

<https://christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au/resources#row--30>

Offering

Prayer from the Christmas Bowl resources:

Loving God, our offerings are small, but all things are possible with You. Use us and our gifts to provide safety and shelter to those in refugee camps.

As our small community joins thousands of other communities in the Christmas Bowl appeal, may we help create a world free from war, terror and fear. We pray in the name of the One who was born in a stable. Amen.

Prayers for World & Community

(Bring a large bowl of water or use your Watery Advent Wreath, a bowl of salt, some fallen leaves or flowers)

Come forward;
dip your finger in the water,
writing or speaking a word,
a name, a place
sprinkle some salt in the water
to represent tears,
place a leaf or flower
to remember a loved one,
to give thanks,
feel the water blessing you also.

Allow plenty of time, play some quiet carols.

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.

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Singing - The North Wind TiS 322

OR: Angels from the realms of glory TiS 309

Blessing

Go now,
knowing that you cradle love within you,
love that is born in the most unlikely places,
love that bears all things,
love that lasts forever,
love that longs to be shared.

In all your days
may you be lifted in hope,
filled with peace,
surprised by joy
and cradled in love.
In the name of the Holy,
Source, Son and Spirit,
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.

Christ child, you came to
quench our longing too.
Grateful tears of wonder,
flow from us, to you.

Watery Advent Wreath:

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