



Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 22nd, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

The Advent Wreath's circle has no beginning or end, symbolizing the love of God which is unending, evergreen for everlasting life, the four candles represent hope, peace, joy and love.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent
we light a candle and name it Love.
This candle shines a light on Mary,
on a mother's love
and on Jesus coming
as God's love made flesh.

**All: O God, come,
make your love real among us.
Give us courage to expect your coming still.**

Light the candles of hope, peace, joy and love

Singing: Come, let's walk. based on Isaiah 2:5
words: Jennie Gordon © 2019
tune: Twinkle, twinkle, little star

Come, let's walk the path of light
through the darkness of the night.
Now the lost don't walk alone,
hungry ones are welcomed home.
Love in what we do and say,
Love between us on the way.

Acknowledging



Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress

As we gather, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these unceded land and waters. We pay respect to Elders past and present. 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 - Long ago, prophets knew TiS 283

OR: There's a light upon the mountains TiS 276



Prayer

Awake in us
an expectation of your coming to us, God.
Help us to expect, wait and work
for the coming of hope, peace and joy.

Along with the lights of the season,
give us the spark of your light
to illuminate our way.
Along with our preparations,
give us an inkling of awe, wonder and excitement
that accompany the pregnant.
Be among us as we worship.

God of Christmas and every day;
of Mary and Joseph,
the surprised, the homeless,
the hopeful and the suffering
and all of us here
- of all who look for your glory around us.

Give us eyes to see your coming among us.
Help us come to Christmas with our eyes open
to the remarkable
that you do in everyday ordinariness;
a baby born,
a present given in love, in a smile or gesture.

Renew our humility to feel awe and gratitude.
Bless us with glimpses of your presence
in each face,
and open us to that absurd and amazing glory
that began with a shocked young woman.

Forgive us, God, if we have forgotten
that the birth of Jesus
is not just the backstory reason
for our Christmas celebrations,
but in fact, the hope we all need.

A time of silent confession



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Awaken our sense of wonder,
that you share our humanity,
were born, as we all are,
vulnerable and helpless.

God, as we watch
and wait for you in our world
in the person of Jesus,
reshape our being
in the pattern of your love.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Passing the peace

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

Listening

Read: Micah 5:2-5
Luke 1:39-55

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

Reflecting -

At my little sister's wedding, my older sister and I waddled down the aisle before her. We were wearing lilac taffeta dresses. They were like circus tents. I was 8 months pregnant with my first baby and my big sister was 5 months pregnant with her second. When I think of that now, I'm filled with wonder. Carrying our girls in our wombs we were bursting with joy, and they would have known and heard and experienced much of the celebration of that day.

Here in the text in Luke's gospel we have a meeting of two relatives, one older, one younger, both of whom carry the unlikely promises of God, announced by the angel Gabriel, seeded and growing in the darkness of their wombs.

Following Gabriel's visit, Mary doesn't waste time heading off into the hill country in

southern Israel where Jerusalem is located, to be with Elizabeth. Gabriel has given her a tip-off that Elizabeth will be someone who will receive Mary with understanding. She knows the unlikely fulfillment of God's possibilities in her own body. In this scene the priestly lineage of Zechariah and Elizabeth, together with the unborn prophet who is to prepare the way, meets the lowly chosen one who carries the promise. Mary's greeting, which was probably something like, 'peace be with you' sparks a leaping of the child in Elizabeth's womb and a loud outpouring of blessing and humility from her mouth. Such a bodily reaction!

It was the sound of Mary's voice that sparked the leaping and shouting. Her simple, cultural, 'g'day' connected so deeply with Elizabeth and her child that it evoked unrestrained celebration and acclamation. It spoke more than the words; it conveyed something utterly beyond words. How reassuring must that have been for Mary? She was just a child in today's culture, barely a teenager, visited by an outrageous angel with an outlandish message, coming to the only person she knew might receive her without shame, scorn or disbelief and she is met with joy and honour.

As Elizabeth's pregnancy progresses into the final three months she shelters Mary in her home. We need the shelter of each other. We especially need to seek out those people who can recognise us, who can be a safe refuge, who can receive us with delight and not judgement. We need people who can engage in the dialogue of the Spirit, often even without words, who can offer an open door, mind, heart and soul, to journey with us in confusing times. This is how we learn about sheltering others, celebrating the gifts of God growing in them, being humbled by the blessing of such spiritual companionship.

It's only in the strength of such a greeting and the presence of such powerful acceptance that Mary can sing her canticle of praise and prophecy. I love the Magnificat, based on Hannah's prayer (*1 Samuel 2: 1-10*) and linked to



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songs with political overtones from other women. Read *Miriam in Exodus 15:19-20, Deborah in Judges 5:1-31 and Judith in the book of Judith 16:1-17 in the apocrypha*. It's strong and subversive, a battle-cry over evil, an outpouring of hope according to the ancient covenant with Abraham. It's a song of fulfillment, even while the most tender seed of promise is still slowly gestating within her. Can we sing the canticle with her? Can we lean into the promises of God that are still growing from the hidden to the revealed, from the unformed to the formed, from the womb to the world?

It's almost Christmas day. We will celebrate God's invasion into the world of flesh and blood through the birth of Mary's child, Jesus. Will we greet the day with delight? Will something leap within us at the way God makes the impossible possible? Our God who sent Jesus to love among us, who showed us the way to live and promised us that not even death could separate us from that love, still invades our world. As we gather to share joy and shelter each other, may there be leaping and laughing, may the weak find strength and the lowly be lifted. May there be love, joy, hope and may there be peace.

Singing - Tell out my soul TiS 161

OR: *The angel Gabriel TiS 302*

Offering

As we wait to celebrate your birth, Jesus the Christ, we bring these gifts and with them we dedicate our time, talents and our lives.

In the waiting there is much to be done, not last minute wrapping and shopping, but noticing those who are hurting and without hope or shelter.

Bless us and bless these gifts that together we might bring your light to birth, in these days, in your name. Amen.

Prayers for World & Community

God who comes to us,
we come full of thanks to you for your promises
to every generation,
and for your mercy to each of us.

This time of year lifts our sense of expectation
and raises the spirit of giving once again.
Then Mary bursts the bubble
of our collective self-delusion
and turns our gaze from lights and presents,
to prayer and concern for the needy.

We are grateful
for the gift of the good things we enjoy
and turn to you,
to join you in your concern
for those without these.

We pray for those families
now suffering the pain of tragedy and loss,
for those painfully divided and those icily distant.
Come anew
and be your healing, loving, peace giving self.

We remember those hungry,
out of work and hope,
those struggling with illness of body or mind.
Come anew
and be your healing, loving, peace giving self.

We pray for peace in a broken world
so full of conflict
that anger and vengeance
seem to have their self-destructive way.
Come anew
and be your healing, loving, peace giving self.

Light our way in the dark places of our world,
O God.
For all who suffer from the darkness of prejudice,
all whose lives are constricted by their difference,
for minorities of faith, race, orientation or colour;
help us to bring the light of acceptance,
that diversity becomes
the celebrated reality of your creation.



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As we celebrate a birth
to a young mother in difficult circumstances,
we pray for all who seek shelter and safety,
belonging and home,
for refugees and homeless people:
**Come anew
and be your healing, loving, peace giving self.**

We pray for those we know
who are in particular need
and name them to you in the quiet:.

**Come anew
and be your healing, loving, peace giving self.**

Then help us, O God to tell, with all our souls,
your greatness,
your blessing
and your invitation to join you
in your healing, loving, peace giving work
in our world.

As 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 - No wind at the window ***TiS 287***

OR: Let earth and heaven combine TiS 305

Blessing

The Celebration and the Worship continues.
It echoes on in our lives,
in our doing and in our dreams.

Take the wonder and elation with you
wherever you go,
to be a blessing to others.

May the God you see
in all the colours of creation bless you
with a sense of awe, expectation and wonder
so the love and grace of God is real to us.

May God, who is our inspiration and courage,
keep calling us on.

May God go with and us bless us;
Be our hope, our guide and our peace
Yes, Amen!

Reflection & Editor: Rev. Jennie Gordon
Shearwater Ministry Team - Cowes

Liturgy: Rev. Ian Brown
Wattlebird Ministry Team - Warragul.

