



## Advent 4

20 December 2020

The Bell is rung and we stand for the Bible - sign of the enduring and ongoing word of God.

### **Acknowledgement of First peoples and Ancestors.**

We acknowledge this land as that cared for and nurtured by the people of the Kulin nation from time immemorial. This is the land where the people of the Wurundjeri language gathered and celebrated their stories, songs and dances passed on by their ancestors and the Great Spirit of the Dreaming over countless generations.

We acknowledge these ancestors and give thanks for their memory.

We also give thanks for the foremothers and forefathers of our St. Andrews' Uniting Church and the Hanbit Church; all those who have given their gifts and graces to be a shining light of God in the Christ among us for the wider Community of which we are a part.

To the community of saints, living and of the past, named and unnamed, we give honour and respect.

The Advent Wreath is lit.

### **Hymn 289**

*'Christmas is coming'  
the church is glad to sing  
and let the Advent candles  
brightly burn in a ring.*

*The first is for God's promise  
to put the wrong things right,  
and bring to earth's darkness  
the hope of love and light.*

*'Christmas is coming'  
the church is glad to sing  
and let the Advent candles  
brightly burn in a ring.*

*The second for the prophets  
who said that Christ would come  
with good news for many  
and angry words for some.*

*'Christmas is coming'  
the church is glad to sing  
and let the Advent candles  
brightly burn in a ring.*

*The third is for the Baptist,  
 who cried, 'Prepare the way.  
 Be ready for Jesus,  
 both this and everyday'.  
 'Christmas is coming'  
 the church is glad to sing  
 and let the Advent candles  
 brightly burn in a ring.*

*The fourth is for the Virgin,  
 who mothered God's own son  
 and sang how God's justice  
 was meant for everyone  
 'Christmas is coming'  
 the church is glad to sing  
 and let the Advent candles  
 brightly burn in a ring.*

**And blessed is she who believed that there would be a  
 fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.** Luke 1:45

Deep within human life a wonder is conceived.

Look for it, for it is near.

Believe in it, for it is of God.

Nurture its life among us, for it is a precious gift for all history.

***Christmas is drawing close. Thanks and praise be to our God.***

As we open our lives to you this day in expectation, Holy Spirit, we pray that  
 we will know you truly, recognising peace and wisdom deep within our lives; so  
 may we respond to new beginnings.

***Come, Holy Spirit, for we come to you in faith as God's faithful people.***

**Hymn**

*What child is this,  
 Who, laid to rest,  
 On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
 Whom angels greet  
 with anthems sweet,  
 While shepherds watch are keeping?  
 This, this is Christ the King,  
 Whom shepherds guard  
 and angels sing:  
 Haste, haste to bring him laud,  
 The Babe, the Son of Mary!*

*Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian fear: for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading:  
Nails, spear, shall pierce him through,  
The Cross be born, for me, for you:  
Raise, raise the song on high,  
The Virgin sings her lullaby:  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,  
the Babe, the son of Mary!*

*So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,  
Come peasant, king, to own Him,  
The King of kings salvation brings,  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.  
Raise, raise the song on high,  
The Virgin sings her lullaby:  
Joy, joy for Christ is born,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!*

### **Confession and Sung Assurance**

O God, we are not at all sure that we would have the faith of your people of so long ago - Mary's openness to your conceiving of the Divine within her, the trust of Joseph in the face of disturbing questions about his ongoing relationship with his betrothed, the life within barrenness cherished by Elizabeth beyond her disappointments of so many years. Be gentle with us now, O God, as you were with these faithful ones so long ago.

***Begin a new song of life and hope in us this Christmastide and gather us into the sweet melody of your loving compassion yet again.***

We know and acknowledge that the life which you would conceive among us is often a daunting challenge, one calling us down pathways which we find hard to tread and inviting in us a quality of faith and commitment which would carry us well beyond where we have been prepared to venture before. And it asks of us a confidence and trust which we haven't been prepared to give to others before: we are tempted to discourage their hopes lest our own inadequacies be exposed. Be gentle with us, O God, as you were with others long ago.

***Begin a new song of life and hope in us this Christmastide and gather us into the sweet melody of your loving compassion yet again.***

**Hymn 283**

*Long ago, prophets knew  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
come to make all things new,  
bear his people's burden,  
freely love and pardon.*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring  
Sing choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
When he comes, when he comes,  
who will make him welcome?*

*God in time, God in man,  
this is God's timeless plan:  
he will come as a man,  
born himself of woman,  
God divinely human.*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring  
Sing choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
When he comes, when he comes,  
who will make him welcome?*

*Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb God is laid:  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected.*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring  
Sing choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
When he comes, when he comes,  
who will make him welcome?*

*Journeyed ends: where afar  
Bethlehem shines, like a star,  
stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour, do not tarry.*

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring  
Sing choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
Jesus comes, Jesus comes,  
we will make him welcome.*

## Reflection

In spite of the miracle that is the Christmas event we Christians still expect God to be big and about bigness. So we still tend to favour images and ways of thinking about God that are couched in language and imagery that involves magnitude and masculinity. But this is quite contrary to welcoming the Christ child, the helpless infant lying in a manger.

## Gospel Luke 1:26-38

**In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you! But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."**

**And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"**

**And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.**

This is the gospel of the Lord.

***Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.***

## Hymn 302

*The angel Gabriel from heaven came,  
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;  
‘All hail’, said he, ‘thou lowly maiden Mary,  
most highly favoured lady’. Gloria!*

*‘For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,  
all generations laud and honour thee,  
thy Son shall be Immanuel, by seers foretold;  
most highly favoured lady’. Gloria!*

*Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,  
To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said,  
'my soul shall laud and magnify his holy name':  
most highly favoured lady'. Gloria!*

*Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born  
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,  
and Christian folk throughout the world will  
ever say most highly favoured lady'. Gloria!*

## **Reflection**

Yes, we rightly focus on the wonder of what happened with Joseph, Mary and Elizabeth – the achieving of what seemed to be impossible but nevertheless occurred within their lives. When God chose to identify with humankind God did so in a helpless little child. God's being with us is a 'being with' through nurturing and so bringing into sharp focus that God is One Whose defining attribute and reality is love; and that love has fleshly reality in God's choosing to be identified with us in Jesus, Jesus whose love in this world in which we do our being is the way of all that is good. As a contemporary poet has put it

*You show the gentler way:  
We come to good by love;  
our words must be made flesh*

Wendell Berry

Yes indeed! As the writer of 1 John iterates and re-iterates in one of his letters,

**let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.....**

**And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.** 1 John 3:18 1 John 4:21

And even more to the point, the love that is ours, as God's gift to us and as the essential attribute of our being, is a love to be experienced and spent for others not as a duty, but, like mother love, as a real consequence of our nature, that of being loved lovers. Or, to use 1 John's words again **We love because he first loved us.** 1 John 4:19

And may the Apostle have the final word

**No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.** 1 John 4:12

## Offering

*Let Christ have space,  
place at the heart of living,  
centre for birth's new breathing,  
cradle for hope and peace,  
cradle for hope and peace.*

*Let love be here,  
love from the Christmas stable,  
love at our open table,  
love to be shared all year,  
love to be shared all year.*

*Shirley Murray*

## Prayers for Ourselves and Others and Lord's Prayer

God, sometimes when we pray for others and ourselves, we know that we feel as if we are praying for the impossible. If our prayers are limited by our timid human vision for your future enlarge them with the grandeur of your purpose. If they are limited by our lack of faith, expand our hearts and souls that we may dare to pray for nothing less than the coming of your reign in all the earth. It is in the unspoken words of our silences that our lives are touched by you, Jesus Christ.

***We open ourselves to all that you offer to us, O God. That we may share in the realisation of divinity in the here and now.***

Break into the present that is our reality.

Raise up, from the depths of our lives love that will never let our neighbours go. Embrace us and all the earth and its inhabitants with healing grace and conceive in the centre of our most troubling despairs the freshness and energy for creative change.

***For you are our God, the God of our earthly reality and we will continue to be your faithful people, those who will never lay down the great hope to which we are called, the hope of heaven on earth. Amen***

***And so we pray as our lord taught us***

## 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*

**Hymn 268**

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come;  
let earth receive its king;  
let every heart prepare him room,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns;  
let us our songs employ;  
while fields and streams, rocks, hills and plains  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders, wonders of his love.*

**Benediction**

May the very stones under our weary feet shout  
aloud the name of the Christ among us,  
the skies above send rays of friendly warmth and  
the Holy Spirit call to us in every moment of our  
living now and always

***Amen***

**Postlude     Noel No VII.C.d'Aquin 1694-1722  
Douze Noels Anciens Pour Orgue**

**Reverend Graeme Kerr**