



Church IN A Bag

**PRAISE TO GOD WHO SENT HIS SON
DOWN TO EARTH WITH US MADE ONE
SING IT ON A SUMMER MORN
THIS THE DAY THAT CHRIST WAS BORN!**

Contents

Sunday 28 November	4
Sunday 5 December	8
Sunday 12 December	12
Sunday 19 December	16
Friday 24 December Christmas Eve	20
Saturday 25 December Christmas Day	25
Sunday 26 December	30



28 November

Peace

A GATHERING

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

Amen

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather, longing for gentleness among all: peace is the home we seek.

We gather, longing for healing where there has been harm.

We gather, longing for generosity to inform all actions.

We gather, longing for peace in all parts of life: God is the home we seek.

Come, let us worship God in a spirit of peace.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent and we light the Candle of Peace. *(Find a candle to light or draw one).*



When Jesus came, He taught people the importance of being peacemakers. He said that those who make peace shall be called the children of God. When Christ comes to us, He brings us peace. And He will bring everlasting peace when He comes again. We light the Candle of Peace to remind us that Jesus is the Prince of Peace and that through Him peace is found (*Light a candle of Peace or draw the light*).

READINGS

Psalm 25:1-10

Luke 21:25-36

REFLECTION

You have heard me say before the I've always loved Charlie Brown and his friends. In a Peanuts comic strip, there is a discussion about what good theology is. Imagine with me, some woolly weather. Linus and Lucy are standing at the window looking out at the rain falling.

Lucy says to Linus, "Boy, look at it rain...What if it floods the earth?"

Linus, the resident biblical scholar for the Peanuts, answers, "It will never do that...in the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow."

With a smile on her face, Lucy replies, "Linus, you've taken a great load off my mind." To which Linus responds, "Sound theology has a way of doing that."

PEACE is an active foundation for a disciple of Jesus Christ, and we obtain satisfaction in life not from "doing nothing" but rather from accomplishing life and spiritual goals. In a strange way, **peace** is connected with growth. **Peace** is an attitude of openness and reaching out and forward. It seeks no sin, whether our search is for a personal peace; personal resolution; personal healing and wholeness; world peace; a larger healing of the world or society; or the coming in of the Kingdom of

God. Either way, the practices of the Christian faith are the building blocks to find peace and wholeness. They are the pursuit and practice of mercy, of forgiveness, of reconciliation and of justice. They are the pursuit and actions of love, hope, compassion, sacrifice, resilience and of patience. They are the pursuit of and commitment to kindness, solidarity, inclusiveness, tolerance, creativity, and imagination. Peace comes when people feel safe.

The sound theology of Peace is not well practiced in the story of humanity. Many throughout history have been attracted to the opposite - things of power, of anxiety, of violence - thinking, oddly enough, that they would bring a feeling of safety. If I can conquer another person, this will bring me safety???

The secret to peace is that it's often fought for: people work hard for it. In other words, it doesn't often just land in our laps. But



sometimes, despite everything around us, we can have peace: a generous gift from God. Most of the time, the stories of history will attest to peace as something that often takes courage.

Courage is a funny thing. Words can stir us to courage but only when they are grounded in confident expectation and hitched to unshakable values or realities. Who would not rally around the "I have a dream..." speech delivered by Martin Luther King Jr., in which he paints the colours of freedom?

Courage towards peace, as a faith's activator, is the call in Jesus' words to us today. He sits with his shell-shocked disciples in the temple grounds, sensing the profound disturbance at his words: that this marvellous place of holiness and beauty will soon lie in rubble, pointing them to a larger cataclysm that will shake the whole earth, as eternity finally burns into time.

We've been there with the disciples, haven't we? Advent often reminds us of our similar need for courage and deeper values. Today we are reminded

that in the reconciliation with God, we are gifted with inner peace. And if we are caught up in the greys of life, at Christmas God sends you the greatest gift you will ever receive. It is wrapped in your heart. Our Lord will keep that promise: the promise of redemption, of the reconciliation, wrapped in your heart. Our renewed start to the lectionary year will first take us to Christmas time.



Because God loves and is on our side, God undertook a courageous plan to take away our fear of horrible death: our fear of the horrible sting, the valley of death. We were terrified and God steps in and solves the problem. God solves the law of justice and replaces it with grace, not karma.

Jesus says not an eye for an eye, but GRACE. And the demands of sin - our mistakes, the stupid ones, the monumental ones, and the hurtful ones - are poured onto Jesus Christ on that cross. It is Christ who conquers death in the Spirit of love for all humankind. What do we have to fear when God is for us? Knowing this helps us to feel safe.

And we show honour to God's purposes here on earth by living a life that speaks of peace: an inner peace and a purpose to seek peace for this whole world. God calls for you. Wholeness is no myth, and part of the story of human wholeness is the quest for peace and then the discipline of maintaining peace within. May God's peace rest in you as you prepare for Christ to come again in this Christmas season.

A SONG - LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me;
Let there be peace on earth,
The peace that was meant to be.
With God as our Father
We are family
Let me walk with each other
In perfect harmony.
Let peace begin with me,
Let this be the moment now;
With every step I take,
Let this be my solemn vow:
To take each moment and live
each moment
In peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.

*Words and music by Jill Jackson and Sy Miller
Copyright 1955. Renewed 1983 Jan - Lee Music
Used with permission CCLI 173204*

CLOSING PRAYER

May the peace of God, which is beyond all our human understanding, be upon you.

May the peace of Christ which breaks down barriers, be within you.

May the peace of the Holy Spirit, which creates true fellowship, be among you.

May you love, serve and work for our Lord throughout this week in peace.

So go in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace to love and serve our Lord, In the name of Christ. Amen

With thanks to Rev Mel Graham
for preparing today's reflection



5 December

Hope

A GATHERING

God of all light, Creator and Light of the World, we approach You with our gladness as a community, even if we are at home.

With gratitude for hope and prayerful stillness, revealing the love and light at the heart of all creation, we stop to worship you, Lord of all hopefulness.

Last Sunday, we lit or drew the first advent candle, reminding us of peace. Today we light or draw the second candle of hope. The people of Israel hoped in God's promises and were not disappointed. Again and again, God delivered Israel. We too have the same experience. Our hope is

in Christ. Hope is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle, we celebrate the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

A PRAYER

Help us today and every day to worship you; to hear your word; and to do your will by sharing your hope with each other. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem.

Amen

PREPARATION

This Advent season is all about preparing ourselves to receive the light of Christ. This week, we arm ourselves with Hope. In our toolbox of things that matter the most in life, Hope is definitely one of them.

Hope and Light are choices we make. This passing year has seen many a challenge, particularly when we went back into



lockdown. We have been sad; challenged in our frailty, our mortality, and our human experience. This beautiful Church community here in Dubbo has held us up when we were low - me included - and moved us toward great healing.

Our choice, as people who know something of God, is to walk towards and value our Hope and light. We are not asked to pretend that life isn't challenging, but to truly live the eternal hope that, in the end, Jesus will lead us all to our great healing. Can you name some people who give you hope from our church community?

READING

Luke 2:1-20

REFLECTION

Hope and light are choices, a way of life: easier when well-practiced, surprising when not expected. It sees the invisible, feels the intangible and achieves the impossible. We are people of hope on a journey. We are called to choose Hope and light. In the shifting fortunes of life, even in seemingly powerless and hopeless situations, God offers the Word of light to our souls. **For**



God's love in Christ transforms people.

In my previous placement, we had an annual Christmas Fair. At one such occasion, a very posh woman whom nobody knew said to me, as we were chatting, that she felt something different around her. She paused and then said with surprise, "I know what it is. I feel like I have swallowed sunshine". What an interesting response to being among Christians at Christmas time.

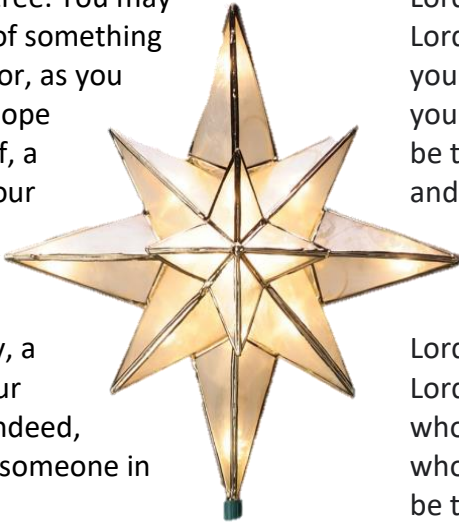
This week, our yearly pilgrimage to Bethlehem continues: first Peace and now Hope. Hope lives in anticipation; hope clothed with cloth, laying in a manger; hope holding the sacred light; hope in a star, seen from afar, to guide folks to the sacred light: the one who came for us. Hear the call this week not to hit the snooze button on your life but to choose Hope and the armour of light anew.

For God is.
For you can know and experience God in Christ
For the experience of God's love in Christ transforms people.

Those are three things you can believe in that will lead to hope.

You can experience that transforming hope today by giving your heart to Christ this Christmas. So let us live honourably, holding up this great value of Hope, and share it kindly with our world.

Today, I invite you to take a star - symbol of light and hope - and put it on your tree. You may also think of something you hope for, as you do this: a hope for yourself, a hope for your family, a hope for our community, a hope for our world or, indeed, a hope for someone in need.



A SONG - LORD OF ALL HOPEFULNESS

Lord of all hopefulness
Lord of all joy
whose trust, ever child-like
no cares can destroy
be there at our waking
and give us, we pray
your bliss in our hearts, Lord
at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness
Lord of all faith
whose strong hands were skilled at
the plane and the lathe
be there at our labours
and give us, we pray
Your strength in our hearts, Lord
at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness
Lord of all grace
your hands swift to welcome
your arms to embrace
be there at our homing
and give us, we pray
your love in our hearts, Lord
at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness
Lord of all calm
whose voice is contentment
whose presence is balm
be there at our sleeping
and give us, we pray
your peace in our hearts, Lord
at the end of the day.

Words and Music in the Public Domain

A CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, we are in awe and give grateful thanks for all the good things in life. We know we don't always get things right.

When we lose focus and direction, set us back on the right path of love.

When we feel cross and bitter words leave our lips, remind us of the abundance of your love.

When we feel overwhelmed by daily tasks, show us the power of stillness; empower us with inner, quiet strength.

When we turn from you, turn us gently back, so that our focus is on you, on HOPE, on light and on the goodness at the heart of all creation.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with others.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**We go in peace to love and serve our Lord, In the name of Christ.
Amen**

With thanks to Rev Mel Graham
for preparing today's reflection



12 December

Joy

A GATHERING

Today we light or draw the third Candle of Advent: the Candle of Joy. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that a special child would be born to her, she was filled with joy. She sang a song that began with the words: "My soul magnifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." Just as the birth of Jesus gave great joy to His mother, so His presence in the world gave joy to those who had none before. He healed them and gave them hope and peace when they believed in Him.

From hope and peace grows joy. We light or draw the candle of Joy to remind us that when Jesus is born in us, we have joy, and that through Him there will be everlasting joy on earth.



Joy is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at this candle, we celebrate the joy we find in Jesus Christ.

A PRAYER

Thank you, God, for the joy you give us. We ask that, as we wait for all your promises to come true and for Christ to come again, you would remain present with us. Help us today and every day to worship you, to hear your word and to do your will by sharing.

Amen

PREPARATION

Joy is good news anytime of the year, but especially at Christmas time. You were made for joy. You weren't made to fret and worry and think dark thoughts. **You** were made for hope and peace and love and light and joy.

For sure, there's always the temptation to fake a plastic happiness. That's not what Jesus is talking about or hoping for us.

Christians need (and have received) the freedom to be real with one another. Christians gather in response to the call of the One who came to give abundant life.

The joy of abundant life is far richer than plastic smiles.

It is a joy for me to worship God here in Dubbo. I hope you're glad to be here, too. If joy were really about, you might even tell a neighbour, 'I'm glad to be a part of this church community.'"

My hope for you all is that you should find joy in our Dubbo Uniting Church community. What I hope for more than anything is that this Church gives you permission to fall in love deeply with life.

READING

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

REFLECTION

We can look at our lives and realise that we spent time fretting over so many things, complaining about this and that, yet life was passing by so quickly. So, let me say it again: You were made for joy. Paul understood that. He

writes: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

When Paul wrote this, he was in prison: in effect, on death row. We are told that when he penned this epistle, he was literally chained to a Roman soldier and guarded day and night. And yet he could say, "Do not be anxious about anything . . ." Wow! I think death row and being anxious is understandable.

But Paul knows something deep within..... and he tells us to rejoice. You might think it takes a special kind of faith to proclaim joy in such dire circumstances, the kind of faith that comes from living in the centre of God's will and love. But God has gifted each of us that same gift, and you were made for such joy.

Spend some time now asking yourself "What is it that robs you of your joy?"



Are we worried about our future? That's the origin of



much of our anxiety, isn't it? One concern of most people is anxiety. People are afraid of losing their health, afraid of losing their wealth, afraid of losing loved ones. People can be afraid of life itself. Or is it the little things that tie us up in knots: usually little things that are easily fixable with time? Is that what is robbing you of your joy: anxiety about your future?

Some people lose their joy because they are continually comparing their lives with others. So, they focus not on their blessings, but on their shortcomings. They cannot find their thanks, so they cannot find their joy. Are those the sort of things that are keeping you from rejoicing: fear about the future, fear that you do not measure up to others?

Do you remember the first thing that the angel said to the

shepherds watching over their flocks that first Christmas night? The first thing the angel said to them was, "Fear not!" That's an important word for us as we approach this year's celebration of the holy event. Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid of the future with its uncertainties! God holds the future. Of all the things in this world that will let you down, it won't be God.

Just when things look their worst, something happens which changes despair to hope. God will not let you down. And don't be afraid that somehow your life doesn't measure up! God loves you just as you are, and there is more to that love story than you will ever comprehend.

Don't worry about your future this Advent season! God is in control. Don't worry about disappointing your family or your friends! But let them know the joy you have in loving them.

Joy is the intervention of God into human affairs. When God arrives, the joy is unspeakable and full of glory. Hear the call to be thankful people despite any external circumstance. Let joy open you up

to the flow of giving and receiving;
Let Joy connected you to what is
important in life; and let JOY help
you to truly feel alive!

“Rejoice in the Lord always.
Do not be anxious about anything,
but in every situation,
by prayer and petition,
with thanksgiving,
present your requests to God.
And the peace of God,
which transcends all
understanding,
will guard your hearts
and your minds
in Christ Jesus.”

Amen

A SONG -

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

O come, O come, Emmanuel
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
and open wide our heav'nly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high
and close the path to misery.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high
and cheer us by Thy drawing nigh.
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Words and music in the Public Domain

A CLOSING PRAYER

Let Joy help you make a difference
in this world

Let joy open you up to the flow of
giving and receiving

Let your joy from within help you
to learn to use your spiritual gifts

Let Joy connect you to what is
important in life

Let joy help you to feel the peace
in your heart you crave

Let us continually long for Joy and
not just for ourselves

Hear the call this morning to build
a life of JOY

and let **JOY** help you to truly feel
alive! Amen

**We go in peace to love and serve
our Lord, In the name of Christ.**

Amen

**With thanks to Rev Mel Graham
for preparing today's reflection**



19 December

Love

A GATHERING

O God, you are with each one of us.

You are with the young, the elderly, the disenfranchised, the war weary, the content, and the discontent.

You give freely and exuberantly to all of us.

No matter who we are, no matter what stage of life we are in, we each receive your gift.

We have gathered to receive your gift with gratitude and songs of praise.

And we have gathered to live in the fullness of life, which you have given to us.



On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we will light or draw the Candle of Love. Love is like a candle shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle, we celebrate the love we have in Christ.

A PRAYER

Lord God, Your witness, John the Baptist, grew up strong in spirit and prepared people for the coming of the Lord. He loved your people and baptized them in the River Jordan to wash away their sins. Help us to have the same love, that we would be witnesses to Him and spread the good news of your love. As Christmas draws closer day by day, help us to be ready to welcome Christ as our Lord.

Amen

PREPARATION

Imagine Mary's soul as a magnifying glass, which simply makes the object more readily visible to human perception. A

magnifying glass can also be used to focus light; it can concentrate the sun's rays onto a small area, heating or burning the exposed surface. Mary's praise illuminates God, who will bring tenderness and forgiveness into the human world forever more.

What will you be focusing on this Christmas?

Spend some time now thinking about what you give priority to in this season. Visualise where you might practice the gift of love this Christmas. Look up Corinthians chapter 13: "4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." How might this guide you with the people who will surround you this Christmas?



READING

Luke 1:39-55

REFLECTION

Mary, like all of us, praised God not because no adversity had ever touched her. She praised God not in spite of all that adversity.

Instead, she praised God because God showed her promise in her situation.

She did not despise or reject the huge task before her, but she accepted it, and found her thanks and praise in it.

If Mary's significance comes from her being a person in whom and through whom God worked God's purpose and will, there is nothing that prevents us from being included with her. It begins when we see ourselves as a people who are committed to the praise and thanksgiving of God.

That is what our life in the Christian faith is about. It is our challenge to continue that praise and thanks in our life beyond this hour or so, reflecting on what Love means to us.

Listen to how Mary sings it: "My heart magnifies the Lord;

my soul is glad because of God my Saviour, for God has remembered me – God’s lowly servant!
From now on all people will call me happy,
because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me.”

Life doesn't change, but the way we can experience it does. My little bit of reality is taken up as part of a divine plan. And in doing that, God brings a different dimension to my life:
a symbol of hope, a source of help, a spring of healing, a call to love well in this world.
To those who believe, and those who do not yet believe, a life of praise and thanks grows not out of circumstances so much as it does out of a vision. It is the vision that is persuasive.

Can we see this week that life does not change, but the way we experience it does? O Lord, help us to be people of ceaseless praise and thanks. That every Christ centred act is an act of hopeful Love. This means we must be people of the present, living in this moment – really living it, not just enduring it. This very moment, for all its imperfections and frustrations - in fact, because of its imperfections and frustrations - is

pregnant with all sorts of possibilities, all sorts of memorable experiences with peace, hope, joy and love.

It is pregnant with the future; it is pregnant with unconditional, absolute, unrestricted love; it is pregnant with our Christ. Today, we once more are reminded that God loves us, and we are called to go and spread God’s love to others. For Christians are busy with the activities of Love, for this world, one another, each other and, don’t forget, for yourselves.

A SONG - LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

Love came
down at
Christmas.

Love all lovely love divine.
Love was born at Christmas
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead
love incarnate, love divine
worship we our Jesus
what shall be our sacred sign?



Love shall be our token
love be yours and love be mine
love to God and neighbour
love for prayer and gift and sign.

Words and music in the Public Domain

A CLOSING PRAYER

Let there be love shared among us
let there be love in our eyes.
May Christ's love sweep this
nation now
cause us, oh Lord, to arise.
Give us a fresh understanding of a
love that is real.
Let there be love shared among us.
Let there be love.

Go out in the world
and enjoy the merriment
the joyous chaos
the re-kindling of friendships
and family ties.

But every now and then
savour a moment of quiet waiting.
In this quiet space
reflect on all
that God has done for us.
Let your soul magnify
God's promises.

**We go in peace to love and serve
our Lord, In the name of Christ.
Amen**

**With thanks to Rev Mel Graham
for preparing today's reflection**



24 December Christmas Eve

A GATHERING

From ancient days
God has been present.
From ancient days
we have wanted peace
and so we prayed and listened.
From ancient days
the promise has sounded.
From ancient days
we journey in hope.
From ancient days
love finds new birth.
From ancient days, we worship in
joyous wonder.

A PRAYER

God of stables and stars, you are
the hope that leads us forward.
You are the love that cradles our
hearts.
You are the peace that quiets our
fears.
You are the joy that sounds
through our voices.
You are the face that shines
through the Bethlehem baby.

Amen



PREPARATION

At this Eve of Christmas day, you
and I are celebrating God's love
story: the birth of Jesus, once and
always born among us.

Jesus came to turn the world right
side up. Jesus came to give dignity
to those not valued by society. To
remind us to be thankful and
cherish life with great joy.

Jesus came to give hope to the
hopeless, peace to those whose

hearts are in turmoil, love to those who are broken.

Jesus came to give you the greatest gift of all.

A life in relationship with God is pregnant with possibilities. Try and look for signs of the unexpected God at work this week. Where is God at work in strange places? Is there an unexpected place where you can do something to share the good news?

READING

John 1:1-14

REFLECTION

Yes, it is Christmas time. We are all but there, standing on the tiptoe of expectation. What are you expecting this Christmas? Our carols and stories at Christmas time show us a glimpse of God. God joined the resistance, if you will, by choosing to be born into it: lowly and quietly, in a backwater region of the Roman Empire, born naturally like any other child, only to a young virgin.

Slowly, deliberately, and with apparent failures and setbacks, the plan of salvation unfolds. Within our small, helpless baby lay the

very heart of God: the vulnerability of the Lord of all the heavens, coming to us.

Called Emmanuel, which means God-with-us, because life is better when God is with us. And once God became one of us, the plans of the Maker of the Universe could begin again to unfold.

Jesus is born to lead us back to loving each other. Our hope lay in our call to bring peace to this world and inner peace to our souls; and true joy, free from disillusionment, frustration and anguish.

Christians believe God seeks to reclaim us all from those things of darkness, the things of fear and worry, to seeking the light of this world. Bringing out hope, peace, goodwill, justice, and love, so that the world is a better place: safer, kinder, and more compassionate. Two millennia after the first Christmas, the baby continues to be born in the hearts of people all over the world.

In coming to us as a helpless baby, God's plan of hope, of peace, of goodwill, and justice and love begins to be fulfilled. And through that small beginning, the Creator of the Whole Universe showed us



that whatever darkness and shame and brokenness we human creatures may or may not do, the power of Divine love is stronger and calls us constantly to wholeness, light and love.

And that, my friends, is the message of Christmas. The message is as radical today as it was 2000 years ago.

Christ is in us. God is made real through us. Jesus Christ is bigger than Bethlehem; bigger than the cast of characters in the story we sing about; bigger even than Jesus of Nazareth.

So, go find out a bit more, because you are curious; because you've never been; because you need someone to value you; because you want to be a part of a community this Christmas; because your grandmother who passed on years ago wants you to; or maybe, just maybe, because you want to be around others who think that gifts of love, joy, peace and hope can change this world for the better. What are you expecting this Christmas?

Please take the story this Eve – its hope and joy, its peace and love – and live it! Don't just endure it,

live it boldly, because your family, neighbours, our community, and our world might be depending on it. Today of all days hear the call deep inside you to the Good News: God came among us because God loves us. And go out into this world, wherever that may be, and beam with your lights turned on inside, for love came down at Christmas and love is all around.

Amen



A SONG - O HOLY NIGHT

O holy night
the stars are brightly shining
it is the night
of the dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world
in sin and error pining
'till he appeared and the soul felt
its worth.

A thrill of hope
the weary world rejoices
for yonder breaks a new and
glorious morn.

Fall on your knees.
O hear the angel voices!
O night divine!
O night when Christ was born.
O night divine
O night divine.

Led by the light
of Faith serenely beaming
with glowing hearts
by his cradle we stand.
So, led by light
of a star sweetly gleaming
here come the wise men from
Orient land.
The King of Kings
lay thus in lowly manger
in all our trials
born to be our friend

He knows our need
to our weakness no stranger!
Behold your King!
Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King!
Before him bend!

Truly He taught us
to love one another
His law is Love
and His gospel is Peace.
Chains shall he break



for the slave is our brother
and in his name
all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy
in grateful Chorus raise we
let all within us
praise his Holy name!

Christ is the Lord
then ever, ever praise we!
His pow'r and glory
evermore proclaim!
His pow'r and glory
evermore proclaim!

Words and music in the Public Domain

A PRAYER

God of joy and grace. In this busy
season and on the eve of
Christmas Day, we take time to
quiet our spirits in your presence.

We pause and remember
Christmas celebrations past and
present and remind ourselves that
the birth of the Christ child is the
heart of this season.

We pause and remember
encounters in your creation that
have filled us with awe and
gratitude.

We pause and remember friends,
family, and strangers who have
shown your love to us.

We pause and remember all those who grieve, struggle or who are in pain.

May they feel your healing presence. Help us to be people of ceaseless hope. That every Christ centred act, is an act of hope.

Which means we must be men and women of the present, living in this moment – really living it, not just enduring it. This very moment, for all its imperfections and frustrations - in fact, because of its imperfections and frustrations - is pregnant with all sorts of possibilities. It is pregnant with the future, pregnant with love, and pregnant with Christ.

Compassionate God, you bless us with the vision of your kingdom, shedding light in our darkness.

Bless us and disturb us, O God, with that vision of your kingdom. In remembrance of your mercy, lift the lowly and fill the hungry with good things.

Look with favour on those whose troubles are known only to you. Comfort and encourage those whom we name on our lips and in the silence of our hearts.

God of joy and mercy, we petition and ask that we might discover and unwrap your gift of unconditional love in some way this season, so that we might see you anew.

Amen

A BLESSING

As we go forth, may we, like the shepherds, journey in the name of love.

May we, like the stable owners, make room for hope.

May we, like the angels, sing out our joy.

May we, like Mary, cradle peace in our hearts.

Amen

**With thanks to Rev Mel Graham
for preparing today's reflection**



25 December Christmas Day

A GATHERING

The waiting is over. Today we celebrate Christ's birth. God has come to be among us.

Light the candles! The hope of our hearts has been born.

Sing the carols! The star to guide our spirits has risen.

Embrace your neighbour! The cradle of compassion receives us all.

Believe in the mystery! The love we long for is here.

God came among us, as a babe in Bethlehem, to awaken hope in us and assure us of a love that is everlasting

Let us receive the good news of this grace.



PREPARATION

Today, don't worry about disappointing your family or your friends with your gift giving, for your peace comes from the prince of peace. Peace inside us, peace all around us and peace in our time.

But let your family and friends know today the joy you have in loving them. That is the greatest gift you can give them. That is the gift God gave us in the stable of Bethlehem.

READING

Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

Luke 2:(1-7) 8-20

REFLECTION

When we say there is abundance of Christmas surrounding us, let us not just mean the tinsel that shines, reminding us to shine our inner lights to the world. Let's not just think of the crassness of commercialisation; the magnificent window displays; the creative fairy tale; the magical time of the year; the

sentimentality surrounding our family or society's traditions; nor all that evokes a tone of excitement and anticipation, even if it means getting "Bob the Builder" as a present (how cool is that gift at age 3?).

But amid all of this, I would simply like to make the observation that Mary and Joseph did not live in a fantasy world: there were some harsh realities surrounding them. And, like us, they lived in a world that had its own private realities. They lived in a world where older ladies were not supposed to get pregnant, like Elizabeth, and neither were young ones who were not married, like Mary. They lived in a world where human life was held cheap: a world that eventually took the lives of both Elizabeth's and Mary's children. And yes, they lived in a world that did not understand the ways of God.

It was in the very midst of all this



harsh reality that Elizabeth and Zechariah, and Mary and Joseph continued to believe and hope in a God who could do marvellous things. They did this in a world very much like ours. And that is why God so uniquely came to them. Not because they were somehow protected from harsh reality, but precisely because, during trying times, they held to their faith. Have you lived through

trying times? Of personal tragedy or grave illness? Through political unrest and politicians disappointing us? Of social upheavals and leaders who were selfish? But these people of the nativity continued **to be open to the call of God**. It was their faith that enabled them to experience the things that they did.

God never presents Godself in revelation, in a way we are forced to believe. We are always left with an option, for that is God's way. Thus, one person can say, "It's a miracle," while another says, "It's a coincidence." Or even, "chaos." One of our carols puts it like this: "*No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin.*"

*Where meek souls shall receive
him still, the dear Christ child
enters in.*" You see, what we see
and what we hear in life depends
not upon the events but rather
who we are as people. It's not
what is out there but what is
inside of us.

Above the din of clanking armies and
a torn homeland, these two women
heard God. While others went about
their daily routines, smelly shepherds
saw the choirs of angels singing.
Whilst Kings like Herod were riddled
with jealousy, wise magi saw a
star and sought out its meaning.

They saw, they heard, they
believed. And thus came our Lord
into the world. Jesus, John and the
disciples, and even Mary and
Elizabeth were not immune to
life's hardships. But Jesus taught

them how to live. He can teach us,
too.

God entered the world as a tiny
babe who came to fix things.
That's impossible for us to get our
minds around. Yet, I can't imagine
any better news in all the world.
The Creator of the universe loved
us enough to come into our world,
and He did it not in power but in
the most helpless guise possible:
that of a baby.

"Fear not," said the angel to the
shepherds, "For, behold, I bring
you good tidings of great joy which
shall be to all people. For unto you
is born this day in the city of David
a Saviour, which is Christ the
Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

Today, on Christmas Day, listen for
our Lord! Hear the call to serve

God with
honour, fear,
and awe! Let
us not hedge
our bets,
seeking joy
and fulfilment
apart from
God, let us
commit to
God!



Do not be seduced by the things of this world that are just clutter: things to trip or to fall over! And do not let God be a left-over thought! When we say there is an abundance of Christmas surrounding us, let us mean the things of hope, of peace, of joy and of love!



Living an abundant and generous Christmas life is to hear the call to be thankful people, despite any external circumstances: To answer the call to feel hope bubbling through you every day!

Let joy open you up to the flow of giving and receiving; Let your compassion help you make a difference in this world; Let your connection to your Saviour on his birthday inspire you this coming year to learn to use your spiritual gifts, so that all may see God at work in the world! Guard your good hope for this world, as did Mary and Joseph! Let your love for Jesus connect you to what is important in life! Let joy help you to feel the peace in your heart that you crave and let the JOY of an abundant Christmas help you to truly feel alive!

Amen

A SONG - JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world! the Lord is come.
Let earth receive her 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 world!
The Saviour reigns.
Let men their songs employ.
While fields and floods
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.

Words and music in the Public Domain

A CLOSING PRAYER

God of hope, peace, joy, and love.

God of compassion, forgiveness, righteousness, courage, and strength, lead us as we celebrate this day in abundance.

When the journey wearies us, we are thankful for your unfailing presence, wisdom, and encouragement.

Give us courage, comfort, and confidence, and challenge us on the way. Help us find our redemption, our healing, and our wholeness. And bless us to become people of great compassion and hope for our community, our family, our neighbours, and our world.

We have heard again this story of the birth of Jesus, once and always born among us.

So take the story – its hope and joy, its peace and love – and live it!

We leave this space ready to live in gratitude; ready to reach out in kindness; ready to walk together in peace, in the grace of the Creator, with the light of the Christ, and in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

**With thanks to Rev Mel Graham
for preparing today's reflection**



26 December

A GATHERING

Lord Jesus, we can so easily get caught up in “the busyness” of Christmas preparations, plans and participation that we miss some of the deep significance of your physical entry into our world. Help us to explore and embrace the wonder of and benefits available from your loving example, and the knowledge that “God is with us”, endorsed by the angels, as foretold in scripture.

PREPARATION

Sometimes life is like a race, and we just want to get over the finish line. So much must be done. Or so we think it must be done. Or so we would like to have it done. Today, we are over the line. Or over one line, at least. The big celebration day has come and gone. Probably, a few of us, if not all, are pleased in a way to have the celebrations behind us, as Mary may have been in the stable 2000 plus years ago.

In her make-shift accommodation, away from home and support, she was probably pondering, “How did all this come about? Why me? My cousin, Elizabeth, might

understand all this. And even though I am a grateful servant of Yahweh, I would have organised the timing differently.”

READING

Luke 2:41-52

“The boy Jesus in the Temple”

REFLECTION

Some words change in meaning with the passing of time.

“Awesome” is one such word that may have lost some of its punch through over-use and exaggeration. There is little doubt that the shepherds in the field were truly awed when they saw and heard angels with the special message that night. Mary would have been in awe, too, when she “was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit”.

Visitors like the Wise Men and Shepherds would have been awed when they recognised her special child. Mary may have thought, “How could this be that they found us here?”



Then 12 years later, after having gone to Jerusalem every year for the celebration of the Passover, Mary and Joseph head home as usual. After a while they find they are missing a child. Something else for Mary to ponder, perhaps? It took three days to find Jesus.

They found him, eventually, in the Temple. His reply, no doubt, answered some of his parent's questions. Jesus said, "Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's House?"

This is the first recorded indication we have, in His own words, that He knew who He was. This presumably wouldn't have made him very popular with his siblings, as they were probably tramping around with their parents looking for him. They didn't understand, but the bible says, "Mary treasured all these things in her heart". Like Mary, there is so much we don't understand. I don't think understanding all God's ways is necessary for us. We will never figure it all out.

What is important is to be awed and believe that Jesus' entry into the world was fulfilling God's plan of redemption for us all.

Christmas Day is the day God personalised himself - God with flesh, bone, and skin. Jesus was sent into the world to follow John the Baptist's theme of repentance and providing an invitation to anyone and everyone to be part of His kingdom: one with a completely different set of values to the world.

Like Mary, we have much to ponder about this awesome plan of God's. The baby Jesus "grew in favour with God and man" - later losing favour with some men - and lost his earthly life so that we may gain eternal life and have a fulfilling life here, as well. We, like Mary, have much, to gratefully ponder about this awesome plan of our loving God.

A SONG - ANGELS FROM THE REALMS OF GLORY

Angels from the realms of glory
wing your flight o'er all the earth
heralds of creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth.

*Come and worship
Christ the new-born King.
Come and worship
worship Christ the new-born King.*



Shepherds in the fields abiding
watching over flocks by night
God with us is now residing
Yonder shines the infant Light
Come and worship ...

Wise men leave your
contemplations
brighter visions beam afar
seek the great Desire of nations
you have seen his natal star
Come and worship ...

Though an infant now we view him
he shall fill his Father's throne
gather all the nations to him
every knee shall then bow down
Come and worship ...
Words and music in the Public Domain

A CLOSING PRAYER

May your personal gifts this
Christmas season be
the blessings of peace
the beauty of hope
the spirit of love
and the comfort of faith.
Amen

**With thanks to David Pattinson
for preparing today's reflection**



Dubbo Uniting Church
64-66 Church Street
Dubbo NSW 2830
p: 6885 4200
e: dubbouca@bigpond.com
w: dubbo.uca.org.au