

Our song to sing or to read: *There is a Hope*

There is a hope that burns within my heart
That gives me strength for every passing day
A glimpse of glory now revealed in meagre part
Yet drives all doubt away
I stand in Christ, with sins forgiven
And Christ in me, the hope of heaven
My highest calling and my deepest joy, to make His will my home.



There is a hope that lifts my weary head
A consolation strong against despair
That when the world has plunged me in its deepest pit
I find the Saviour there
Through present sufferings, future's fear
He whispers 'courage' in my ear
For I am safe in everlasting arms, and they will lead me home.

There is a hope that stands the test of time
That lifts my eyes beyond the beckoning grave
To see the matchless beauty of a day divine
When I behold His face
When sufferings cease and sorrows die
And every longing satisfied
Then joy unspeakable will flood my soul, for I am truly home.

Music and Lyrics by Stuart Townend and Mark Edwards.
Copyright 2007 ThankYou Music. Used with permission CCLI173204

A Prayer

God as we come to the end of our time of worship and contemplation, help us remember that hope is born as a Christmas child and hope is your promise of a better tomorrow. In a world filled with sorrow, may we always have hope.

Amen

With thanks to Anne Vail and Raelene Burn for preparing today's reflection



Church in a Bag
29 November 2020
Dubbo Uniting Church



Gathering

As we pour the water for our Advent wreath, we remember our deep thirst for God's **hope** (*Pour water into your first glass*)

Hope which revives us, like that first icy cold drink of water gulped down from the fridge when you've trudged home from school on a 36° day

Hope which transforms us, like drought-breaking rain on parched land

Hope which carries us forward in its mystery, as the endless waves connect us to the rest of the world

We name aloud people and places in particular need of God's **hope** at this time

Advent God, we worship you with **hope**

We long for your **hope**, O God.

Amen



An Advent Song: In the Beginning.

Here is the link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnG6YQeDbao

Preparation

Hope involves looking to the future for better times to come. Part of this hope is crying out to God to bring about this better future. We know that through Jesus, God has already started to bring this better future into being. Today's Psalm is calling on the Lord God, All-powerful to "smile on us and save us". I wonder what might change God's frown to a smile.

I invite you to frown, raise your hand in front of your face, like a mime, and turn your frown into a smile. Practice that. Great frowns and lovely smiles.

Let's worship God!



Reading: Mark 13:24–37

Reflection: How do we find hope

How do we reconcile the “irrational season” of current events that has been 2020 with the timeless story of the birth of Jesus?

How many Advent seasons have we been through in which violence or devastation from drought or fire or cyclone has predominated the news?

We are coming to the end of 2020, a year that many would wish to forget as the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone in different ways. We all shared health concerns for others and ourselves. There have been financial impacts on individuals and our society throughout the shutdown periods. We have endured political verbal slanging matches that seemed not to change any outcome. Mostly though, we have felt the impact of social isolation through the loss of our daily routines relating to our work, our friendships and our mental and physical health.

A hundred years ago, in the aftermath of World War 1 and during the Spanish flu pandemic, the poet, William Butler Yeats, wrote his poem “The Second Coming” <https://poets.org/poem/second-coming>.

“Things fall apart

The centre cannot hold....The best lack all conviction

While the worst are full of passionate intensity....

And what rough beast ... slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”

Yeats’ poem seems to suggest that world affairs and spirituality must undergo transformation from time to time. The Human race has to experience darkness before the light can stream in again through the cracks.

Things might fall apart, and systems collapse. Spiritual refreshment can only be achieved through the second coming: a Christian concept involving the return of Jesus Christ on Earth. In Yeats’ “Second Coming”, however, he does not envision a holy birth of an infant Christ in a lowly manger, or a Saviour. Something far sinister is in prospect: “a rough beast”, slouching forward, about to be born en route to a symbolic Bethlehem.

Perhaps this could manifest as war; huge social and political change; climate change; or environmental disaster.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2 written around AD 55, the writer recorded “Do not be afraid, for see - I am bringing you good news for all the people”. **This is a proclamation of hope** despite Herod being on the throne; bad government using taxation to oppress people’s lives; and the murder of infants decreed by a deranged ruler.

Perhaps in an ironic juxtaposition of today’s current events and the historical background of Jesus’ birth, we can find some hope in knowing that the worst of times can also co-exist with the best of times. In the messiness of human sin, hope is not completely lost. In the ashes of history’s sad record of pillage and plunder, the voices of hope have not been completely silenced.

Over 2000 years ago Jesus came into a messy world. 2020 is ending and we’re still trying to make sense of where we fit in this messy world. Perhaps as we sift through all the negative news that caused us heartache, we can proclaim the countering fact that **Jesus Christ is here to stay with us** here on earth and intends to love us till the end of time.

My Advent hope – in the midst of all the contradictions and dissonant voices that tend to drown out the original song of the angels – one of a holy birth for a needy world – may each of us experience a part of Jesus within ourselves every day.

What is your hope?

