

A song to sing or to read: Community of Christ

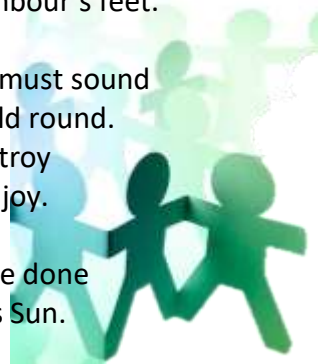
Community of Christ, who make the Cross your own
live out your creed and risk your life for God alone.
The God who wears your face, to whom all worlds belong
whose children are of every race and every song.

Community of Christ, look past the Church's door
and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.
Take hands with the oppressed, the jobless in your street
take towel and water, that you wash your neighbour's feet.

Community of Christ, through whom the word must sound
cry out for justice and for peace the whole world round.
Disarm the power that war and all that can destroy
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish into joy.

When menace melts away, so shall God's will be done
the climate of the world be peace and Christ its Sun.
Our currency be love and kindness our law
Our food and faith be shared as one for evermore.

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Closing Prayer

Christmas continues, Christ. Beyond your birth, Christmas continues.
You continue to be Immanuel, God with us, at work with and within us.
The hope, peace, joy and love which were remembered in Advent,
continue to be needed in a hard, hurting and mixed-up world. You
continue to awaken these sentiments in our hearts and in our heads,
that we might continue to join with you in bringing your kingdom of
love. You continue to call us to love and good deeds, as we join in your
mission and ministry to redeem and transform all. May we continue as
Christmas people, being an incarnation of your love, will and way. This
we continue to pray. **Amen** *(Jon Humphries)*

With thanks to Shirley Colless for preparing today's reflection



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Church in a Bag Sunday 7 February

Dubbo Uniting Church



A Gathering

This is the time when we come together
as the church to commit ourselves to the
work of the Lord we love for the coming
year. Like the aged man Simeon,
righteous and devout, we too look
forward to consolation and the resting of
the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Preparation Prayer

God of life, who calls us to be the church
**we gather together as a community to
listen for how you are speaking to us
today.**

God of justice, who calls us to live lives of
love

**we gather as a community of people who
try to understand what that means from
day to day.**

God of promise, who calls us to be people
of hope

**we gather as people who are looking for
signs that the Kingdom is being made real
in our midst.**

In this time of worship
refresh us, challenge us, renew us.

We pray in the name of the one who
taught us the way of love and who
challenges us to serve each other.



Reading: Luke 2:22-40

Reflection

All of the rituals have been observed: for seven days after the birth of her son, Mary was deemed unclean. On the eighth day Jesus was circumcised. Then it was another 33 days before Mary could be purified, which meant that she needed to bring with her a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or dove for a sin offering. But there was a further obligation: according to the Law of Moses, every first-born son had to be presented to the Lord, to be designated as holy to the Lord. These ancestral traditions are a reminder to them that Jesus is born in the context of the covenant established between God and the people Israel.

As our Moderator reminded us recently, God turns up in unexpected places and through unexpected people. Mary and Joseph were simply, in faith, fulfilling obligations and probably, by that time, longing to get home to Nazareth to settle down to family and work life. But as they came into the Temple, this old bloke takes the baby out of Mary's arms, without asking permission. Imagine Mary's and Joseph's shock and their subsequent amazement hearing what Simeon was saying.

While Luke wrote down this story after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70CE, using that setting was appropriate for a story revolving around the theme of redemption. It is also a hearkening back to a remembrance of a time when life seemed safe, traditions were observed, and Joseph and Mary could safely negotiate registering in a Roman census (2:1-11) while worshipping in the Temple of the one God.

But Luke's story and Simeon's words show that we should not look at this story through eyes gummed up by any idea of peace and tranquillity. In telling of the presentation of Jesus to the Lord, Luke looks backward by linking his story to the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Children born into slavery belonged to the slave master; in consecrating them to God, the Israelites affirmed their new identity as God's people.

But Simeon is looking both backward and forward, to the destruction of the first Temple and the Exile, and to the consolation of Israel. Taking the child in his arms, he declares that the moment of deliverance is at hand – but then comes the bad news. Simeon warns Mary and Joseph that the child who marks the presence of salvation in their midst will also be the cause of the 'falling and rising' of many. This 'falling and rising' will not be the result of war, economic overturn, or natural disaster. Instead, it will come about through radical transparency, as people's inner thoughts are revealed. The windows into the soul will be thrown wide open.

Anna's words pick up this anticipation of disruption. Her constant state of fasting identifies her as one in a state of mourning, not for her husband, but for the people of God. But, seeing the child, her mourning turns to praise! God has come to bring about the return of his people from exile.

And in the middle of this is the child; a month to six weeks old. He is mentioned by name only once, otherwise he is simply referred to as 'the child'. These are substantial words spoken about someone so very small. But Luke has been playing on this contrast throughout the birth story. The saviour of the world is born in a stable, while another 'saviour' of the world, ie Caesar, sits on a throne in Roman splendour. In striking contrast, Jesus' parents bring the offering designated for the poor: two turtledoves. It is this child, born in poverty, who is the true saviour. He is the sign of God's consolation and redemption. We are left in anticipation to watch as the child grows strong - filled with wisdom and blessed with the favour of God – and inevitably comes to the confrontation with both church and state.

