

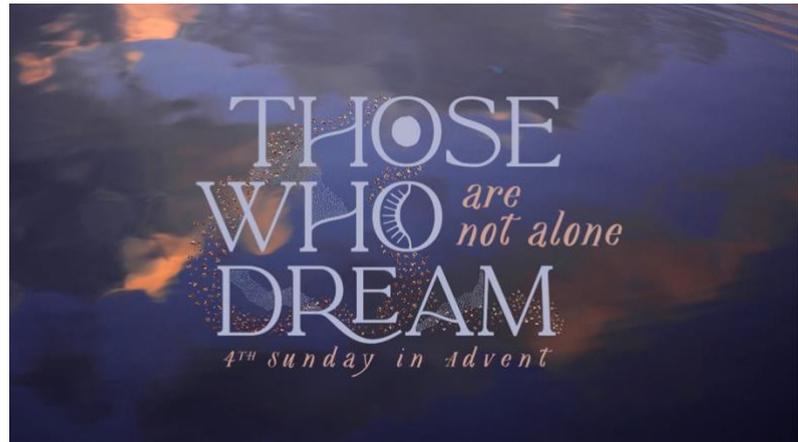
Those Who Dream... sow love

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle. This week, it would be appropriate to find a purple cloth or scarf to decorate the table.

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

A video of the readings and reflection for this service can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/493209915/8f98d04ad3>



Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise the stewardship of the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation for the land on which we gather today. Our indigenous brothers and sisters have cared for this place since time immemorial and pay our respects to them and their elders, past, present and emerging. We commit ourselves to the continuing work of seeking justice and reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

One: I knew joy, but when I heard the laugh of my child,

All: Suddenly, joy was overflowing.

One: I knew love, but when you held my hand,

All: Suddenly, love was overflowing.

One: I knew God, but when you showed me grace, when you forgave me, when you loved me, when you raised me,

All: Suddenly, God was overflowing.

One: So, let us worship Holy God together As a reminder that God is here and we are never alone.

All: This is community.

One: This is the body of Christ.

All: Welcome home.

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Candle Lighting Liturgy

(If you have a candle, light it as you read these words)

The Candle of Love

A: I dream of music that makes my heart swell.

B: I dream of trees that take my breath away.

A: I dream of sunrises that wrap me in light.

B: I dream of family dinners that feel like home.

A: I dream of church services that give me hope.

B: I dream of love as the default.

A: So today, as we draw near to Christmas day, we light the candle of love. Light candle.

B: May this light burn bright as a reminder that God is here and God is love.

A: We are not alone. Thanks be to God for a love like that.

Amen.

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Sing: **Love divine all, loves excelling**

<https://youtu.be/jmzCF6Gg9Mw>

Prayer of Confession

God of Good News,

You say to me, "You are highly favoured," but I struggle to see how that could be.

You say to me, "Do not be afraid," but I am afraid all the time.

You say to me, "Even the impossible is possible, just look at Elizabeth!"

But hope slips through my hands like water. The impossible still feels impossible.

So today I pray,

Today we pray:

Teach us to sing like Mary.

Teach us to laugh like Elizabeth.

Teach us to trust like the angels.

Forgive us when we can only do one at a time, or none at all.

Amen.

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Prayer for Illumination

Holy God, Before you could speak, you were speaking— Leaping in wombs, kicking, stretching, jumping for joy.

You have always found a way to show up in our midst, Particularly on our fearful or lonely days.

So today, as we crack open our Bibles,

Fluttering through these old beloved pages,

We ask that you would move again.

Stir in us. Speak to us.

Fill us with the Holy Spirit.

And if we are not able to hear your Word clearly,

Then give us Elizabeths Who will point out your presence in delight and joy.

Before you could speak, you were speaking,
So here and now, Creator God, we are listening.
Amen.

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: 2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

God's Promise to David

⁷ After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

³ Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

⁴ But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

⁵ "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? ⁶ I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷ Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'"

⁸ "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. ¹⁰ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹¹ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders^[a] over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you:

¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me^[b]; your throne will be established forever."

Reading: Luke 1: 26-38, 46-55

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with

God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[b] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."

Reflection:

When I was 14, I was in 3rd form at high school (year 9), I had longish brown, fine, straight hair, I was about average height for a 20th century female but smaller than the rest of my family. I had a very usual life. And the limit of my work life was that on Saturday mornings I went grocery shopping with my mother and my job was to drop off and pick up my dad's white shirts at the Lindfield laundry shop, then go next door and buy two cartons of cigarettes for my parents, and either go to work with mum to wash labels off pill bottles or, in the winter, play hockey for the school.

I don't know what I would have done if an angel appeared and told me I was to give birth to God's own Son...

I often think about the young Mary and the instant pressure on her; young, unmarried, betrothed to an older man and now pregnant to someone else. (Pause)

And her response? Joy and adoration that God had chosen her to fulfil His plan to restore the world, to reconcile all things to Himself once more, to fulfil His promise made to Abraham, Jacob and Isaac, through Moses and David, that One would come, the Messiah who would make everything right. (Pause)

I had a birthday a couple of weeks ago and I have to say I am racking up the years. I don't know what I would do if I suddenly found out I was to have a baby and an angel appeared to my husband to tell him who this baby would be. I think about Elizabeth, faithful and long suffering, hardworking but also feeling the pain of not having a child. (Pause)

And Elizabeth's response? Joy and adoration that God had chosen her to bring to life a prophet who would announce the arrival of the Messiah; one who would prepare the way, affect lives so they would see and believe God's work in the Messiah.

The fact that these two women were related and then sought companionship with each other is no accident, it was no co-incidence in the lives of either woman. They knew each other, they needed each other and had each other as support, encouragement and for celebrating God in their lives.

Mary sought the help, the advice, the encouragement of Elizabeth because Elizabeth's joy filled their lives with laughter. In Luke's gospel it says this:

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! "And how has it *happened* to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. "And blessed *is* she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

And in reply, we hear Mary's song...

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour...

Mary's song is her affirmation of faith, her clear statement that she knew what God had done and knew what God was doing, through the most natural thing which happens to women. Dr Marcia Riggs, in her commentary from our weekly devotional, says it teaches that there is solidarity when we witness and share that which God calls us to be and do.

Mary's song is also is a call for revolution:

Mary says "he has scattered those who are proud in their inner most thoughts." This is moral revolution – remembering that Mary and Elizabeth were women in an oppressive religious culture, living as oppressed people under a ruthless foreign regime. Yet here is Mary saying to everyone that God will dispense with arrogance – dispose of those who put themselves ahead of all others...this is a call for moral reform.

Mary says, "he has brought down rulers from their thrones but as lifted up the humble." This is social revolution – remembering that then, and even now, little things like a limp or slow speech or being a tax collector, or a woman or a child meant they couldn't attend the synagogue or participate in religious life with others. It meant that widows would starve if they had no sons or generous relatives. This calls for Christians to move away from labels

and use of prestige or privilege. Caring for the least becomes the most important role for everyone...this is a call for social reform.

Mary says, "he has filled the hungry with good things but he has sent the rich away empty." This is economic revolution and calls for Christians to not accumulate things but share what resources are available. Mary was from a humble background but grew up in a community where wealth was always worn on the outside, the more you have the more power and capacity you have to control the lives of others for your benefit. Mary's statement draws attention to our need to see our resources as those things which help us build the Kingdom of God, here and everywhere.

While we don't necessarily revere Mary in the same ways as some other Christian brothers and sisters, she still has much to teach – a devoted young woman who when God asked her to take on this role, as mother of God, not only said yes but responded with joy and adoration to the God who would fulfil His promise of reconciliation and restoration to all people.

And may God add his blessing to these words.

(Reflection by Meredith Yabsley)

We affirm our faith with this statement

Affirmation of Faith

We believe that this world is hard—
Harder than it has to be.
When the world falls apart around us,
We believe in listening for the angels that say, "Do not be afraid,"
And in seeking out the Elizabeths in our lives—
Those who laugh with joy at our arrival
And throw open the doors to their homes.
We believe that healthy relationships can offer healing,
Through the laughter of cousins,
The joy shared between siblings,
And the home found in partnership.
Therefore, we believe in church families,
In chosen families,
And in the love that extends beyond family.
We believe in friendships, In neighbours,
And in leaning on each other when the going gets tough.
We believe in the Triune God— Lover, Beloved, and Love itself—
Inherently relational, always connected, and never alone.
We believe that that same belovedness exists for us.
We believe that we are loved and claimed,
Never alone.
Thanks be to God for a love like that.

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Listen: Mary did you know

Responding

Prayers for others:

Loving God,

throughout history, you have been active in this world, speaking, guiding, whispering, and nudging us to be the people you know we can be.

You have spoken through angels, messengers of your grace, justice, and love.

You have spoken through prophets, the truth-tellers of our world who call us from self-interest to community, from human limitation to divine vision.

You have spoken from our own flesh, embodying all that it means to be human.

From your newborn cry to your final, heartbroken words, you spoke to us of the abiding love and the enduring covenant, which have never failed, no matter how often we have turned away.

You have spoken, Holy God, throughout all generations.

Help us to hear you speaking to us now.

Help us to take the ancient stories of our faith and learn from them, as Mary did.

Help us to re-imagine the words of prophecy that still speak truth to our lives, that we might learn to respond to the enduring truth of your call.

Help us to resist the temptations that have followed humanity since the beginning.

May we set aside the idols of wealth and status, self-interest and self-importance.

May we abandon the conceit that being made in the image of God means that God is just like us.

Help us to re-imagine what it might look like to say yes when we hear your call; to not focus on what might be hard, but rather on what might be made possible.

Help us to carry you within ourselves.

Help us to embody your holy love so that it is not only our souls that magnify you but our words and our deeds.

Help us to remember that your incarnation continues, as you dwell, not within the buildings we construct, not in church or synagogue or mosque or temple but within the very love of our hearts.

Help us to say, "yes" to you, God of Grace.

Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit

Offering

In responding to what we have read and how we have heard God speak to us, we commit ourselves to moving with God's Spirit, breathing life in the world around us.

Prayer of dedication or offering prayer

Creator God, we bring our gifts and ourselves, our treasure and our heart. Bless us, in all that we offer, that our offerings might be used in your call to us: to be stewards but not owners of that which have been given, to be places in which you abide but not where you are constrained. Bless us, that in our giving, we might open ourselves to your call to seek justice and mercy for all that you have created, for all that you love. Amen.

Season of the Spirit

Notices:

- if you would like to be on our email list, please email the church office at kiamaunitingchurch@outlook.com
- Advent - devotional studies - some copies still available
- Uniting World - gift cards are still available online
- Christmas Bowl - envelopes are available - you can return them directly, give online, or put your envelope in the offering plate
- Christmas Services - who will you invite to share this special time? Banners in Kiama and Jamberoo give times and locations for our Christmas Services.

Blue Christmas on Tuesday Dec 22 at 3pm. This is a service making space for the harder moments about this year and this time of year, those in sorrow, those grieving loss, those who are supporting others as they struggle. Invite someone who may find this is just what they need.

Messy Christmas this afternoon - if you have grandchildren, this is a great opportunity to bring them along to share in some craft and for them to hear the story of Christmas. It will help us if you can give us some idea if you are coming. And if you are available to help out on the day with craft supervision or general crowd control, please let me know.

Sending out

Sing: Tell out my soul, the greatness of his love.

<https://youtu.be/s6ji4y9Q-K0>

Final blessing

Peace be with you. Love be in you. Mercy be among you. Justice be around you. Go out into the world Reflecting God's presence Resisting fear Re-imagining your place in the ongoing incarnation of God's holy love.

Seasons of the Spirit