

Laying The Foundations (Peace)

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 signify that we are in a time of "preparation".*

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

Welcome

Welcome!

My name is Kath, and it is my privilege to share in ministry with you in this place.

It is a great joy this morning to be celebrating the opening of these wonderful new facilities.

Acknowledgement of Country

Across the vast and beautiful land that is now called Australia, indigenous peoples have cared for the earth since time immemorial.

In this place, between the ocean and the mountains, the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have lived in harmony with the land and waters and its flora and fauna.

We give thanks for them and this place.

We pay our respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

And we pray that we will learn to walk together and to care for one another and this land in ways that honour our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Light Candle

We light a candle to centre us and to draw us towards Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Call to Worship

If life was a home, perhaps our prayer would be:

May love be the foundation.

May God be the cornerstone.

May the Spirit be the windows - ushering light in.

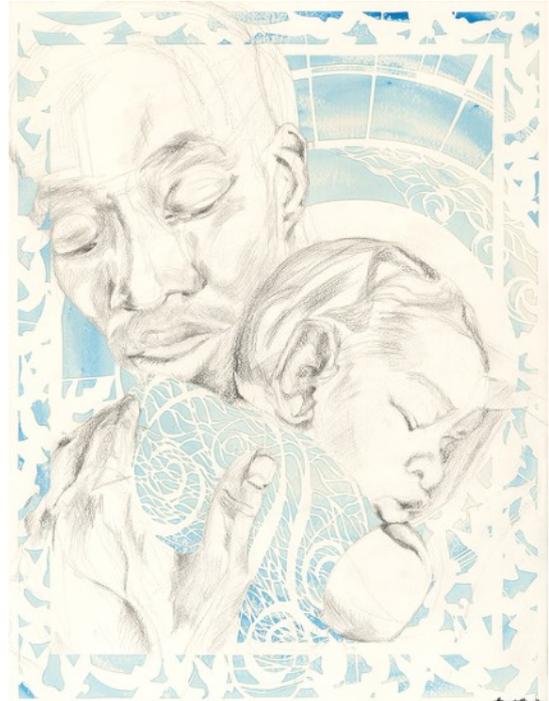
And may hope be the walls - holding us together.

In this time of worship, let us work toward building that home together.

We may not know the path ahead, but God is here, even now.

Let us give thanks for a foundation of love.

Let us worship God.



Berakah | Hannah Garrity

Sing - All Are Welcome - (v.1)

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

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Advent Candle - Peace

As we reflect on the foundation of our faith in our lives, we gather together today around the candle of peace.

First, we re-light the candle of hope. [*light the candle lit last week*]

The home we long for is built on a foundation of love with Jesus as our cornerstone.

The home we hope for is a home that knows peace:

A peace at the core of our being

A peace that calms our anxiety

A peace amidst our relationships

A peace experienced down the street and around the world.

The home we long for is a home that knows peace.

So today we light the candle of peace - as a reminder and as a prayer.

[*Light the next purple candle*]

Let us give thanks for a foundation of love as together we build a home of peace.

Let it be so. Amen.

Cory Nelson, adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

Sing - Hope is A Candle (Seasons 6-17 - v.1,2)

Hope is a candle, once lit by the prophets,
never consumed though it burns through the years;
dim in the daylight of power and privilege,
when they are gone, hope will shine on.

Peace is a candle to show us a pathway,
threatened by gusts from our rage and our greed.
Friend, feel no envy for those in the shadows,
violence and force: their dead-end course.

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Words: Richard Leach. Music: Traditional

Prayer of Praise

Holy God,

we gather in this place grateful - grateful for the amazing environment in which we live -
oceans, forests, rivers, parklands - all surround us with the beauty of your creation.

We are grateful for this space - a space of welcome, hospitality, of safety, of friendship, of
hope and peace and joy and love.

God, in our gathering, may we reflect your welcome for all peoples.

Christ Jesus, you entered our world and embraced all humanity can be.
You invite us into relationship with you and into life that abounds with love.
We are grateful that your love has no limits.
Christ Jesus, in our living, may we reflect your love.

Holy Spirit, you are always with us, nudging and prompting us to be all that we have
been created to be. Your presence amongst us holds us and sends us.
Spirit of Life, may we be energised with your life. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

In our scripture passage for today, Zechariah, a new father, speaks to his newborn son,
John the Baptist, for the very first time. I want you to imagine yourself in his shoes . . .
What would you say to a newborn sleeping in your arms? What would you want them to
know on their very first day? What would feel important?
I imagine that all of you would speak words of love.
It's impossible not to speak words of love when you're holding a baby, and yet as we
grow up, that skill tends to become harder for us to practice. So let us return to our
foundation—to words of love, starting with love for ourselves.

Let us pray...

Holy God,

When John was Born, Zechariah leaned down and whispered words of love into his ear.
We know that you do the same for us, day in and day out, yet we fail to hear it.

We forget that in the beginning we were made good.

We doubt that we could possibly be enough.

We hustle for our self-worth and wear ourselves out aiming for perfection.

We deflect words of praise.

We hide behind shiny first impressions.

Forgive us.

Trusting our worth is the hardest job.

Open our ears as you open our hearts,

so that we might rest on the foundation of goodness you have laid for us.

Gratefully we pray, Amen.

Words of Assurance

Family of faith,

no matter how old we get, God continues to say to us:

“You are loved; you are forgiven.”

That is the foundation of our lives.

That is the truth upon which we build our home.

So breathe deeply.

There is grace and peace here.

Join me in proclaiming this good news:

We are loved.

We are forgiven.

We are claimed.

This is our foundation. Thanks be to God. Amen.

A prayer by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Sing - Gather Us In (Together In Song 474)

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see, in this space, our fears and our
dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this
day.

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;
gather us in, the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a
mystery;
we are the old, who yearn for your face;
we have been sung throughout all of
history,
called to be light to the whole human
race.

Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,
gather us in, the proud and the strong;
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.

Here we will take of wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth,
here you shall call your sons and your
daughters,
call us anew to be salt of the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you;
nourish us well and teach us to fashion
lives that are holy and hearts that are
true.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven light years away,
but here in this space, the new light is
shining,
now is the kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in, and hold us forever;
gather us in, and make us your own;
gather us in, all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

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Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 1:67-80 (Julia)

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

⁶⁸ 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a mighty saviour for us
in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹ that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

⁷² Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us ⁷⁴that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he
appeared publicly to Israel.

Reading: Luke 3:1-6 (Julia)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ’

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection - Rev Janice Freeston

I wonder how many of you make lists of things you need to do. Perhaps it is a daily list, phone calls to make, letters or emails to send, banking that needs to be done, shopping that needs to be seen to. I use lists so that I don't have to keep reciting over and over again in my head what I need to do. It is a way to unclutter my mind.

When our kids were teenagers, we had a system with the shopping list. If you opened the last tin or packet, you wrote the item on the list. If you used the last one of anything, you put it on the list. Friday was my day off when I was working full time and one morning, I was out doing my errands when I was pulled over for a random breath test. The police officer wasn't in any hurry that morning and luckily for me, neither was I. He asked what I was on my way to do. I happily said I was off to do the weekly shopping. Mid-sentence, I realised I had forgotten the shopping list. It was sitting on the kitchen bench. The officer noticed my hesitation and asked why. When I told him I had left the list at home, he smiled and asked what I would do. I said, well if all else fails, I'll buy chocolate! I went on my way and remembered most of the things on the list, including the chocolate. Everyone knows that Friday is chocolate day, right?

I was an ambulance chaplain at the time and was called out to an incident later that same afternoon. There were ambulance and police at the scene and when everything was sorted we all returned to our cars at about the same time. As an officer was getting into his police car he called out, “so did you buy chocolate”? and everyone, I mean every one of the emergency service personnel laughed. My shopping habits were the talk of the town.

I still write a list, particularly around Christmas time. It can be such a busy time when my mind can get very cluttered. Perhaps one of the most difficult things about the Covid Pandemic is that our lists have either become very full or very empty. For emergency workers and essential workers, there has been a great deal more to do, more things to consider, more steps that need to be taken. For the rest of the population, there has been very little to do apart from an hour's worth of exercise and the shopping and doctors appointments but even those have often been done by phone.

As we begin to open up again, we are now able to catch up with a few things that we had to put aside for a while. There has been a rush on hairdressers and barbers, to say nothing of stocking up on toilet paper! For many of us, Christmas is a time for cluttering. Our calendars are already filled, and yet we find more things pushing themselves upon us. Being honest, most of us know that our lives, our homes, our schedules, our world is already over stuffed and yet at Christmas we bring out more stuff. When we begin to decorate, boxes are pulled out from the attic, garage, a closet or maybe from all three places. As we begin to unpack the decorations, they bring out with them so many memories. But in order to find a place to put them, we have to rearrange some of the things that are already out in our homes during the year. Most of our homes already have things filling the shelves, the tabletops, and the cabinets, and here comes more. I struggle these days to work out how to fit the Christmas tree in the lounge room.

It seems, the world doesn't stop for Christmas. Many will still have to work or keep appointments or do those things that keep our lives running. But now we will try to find more time for friends and family. We add to an already hectic world more things we must do.

Then there is shopping. The economic times we live in make this an even greater challenge, as we desire to please those we are giving gifts to with the budget we have to spend. This means more time and more effort.

When we think about that first Christmas, with Mary and Joseph “making do” with having their child in a place where the animals sheltered, it is good to ask ourselves “do we need all of this clutter”?

The wise men and the shepherds all came to Bethlehem for one reason: to worship and adore the one who came at Christmas. They were not distracted by clutter in their lives. Out of all the stars that filled the sky, the wise men stayed focused on one and they travelled for a long time to get there. The sheep had for a moment to be set aside for the shepherds to go to Bethlehem and see what the angels told of.

John the Baptist, who speaks out in our Gospel this day, was one of the most colourful characters in all of history. He wasn't interested in wearing the latest fashion, although he was unknowingly a trend setter. He wore a camel hair coat long before that became fashionable. He lived on locusts and wild honey. And his marketing techniques weren't the best in all of history. He went out into the wilderness, away from the city, away from the crowds, and yet attracted a great crowd. He seemed almost determined to fail. Despite all these things we would call poor marketing, the Gospel of Matthew tells us that people from all over the region were flocking to hear this message.

The desert plays a significant role in the lives of the Jewish people. They had been in exile in Babylon with a wilderness forming a barrier to them finding their new home. Many prophets would go to the desert to listen for God. One guy even strapped himself to the top of a poll and stayed in the desert for years!

In the desert, you can see a great distance, you can see the truth. In the desert you can take a sobering assessment of your life and see yourself more clearly. In the desert you can see the world more clearly and change how you live. In the desert it becomes clearer as to what God wants us to do as a community. In the wilderness God's people know, that the way will be prepared for the Lord.

Preparing a way means to be willing to ask some tough questions and make some hard decisions. Decluttering takes some effort. You might define clutter as a disordered state. You can generally see what clutter is by looking at my desk or my dining table. Clutter can

be discouraging to us. It can become a barrier to us making any progress or keeping our focus.

It is helpful if we focus on one thing at a time. When we multi-task, when we try to do too many things or set too many goals, the result is that we can easily face a stack of uncompleted things in our lives, which clutters our days and our thoughts.

To prepare the way of the Lord means to make choices. We must decide what we are to focus our lives and days on. We must decide what we will keep and what we will let go.

Clutter can fill our hearts and minds and drain us of energy and more importantly it can diminish our hope. There are the regrets of things we did not do in the past or things we wished we had done. You might call this the clutter of the way not chosen. There are also the regrets for things we have said and done that we are ashamed of. Listen to John the Baptist's words of repentance. Let those regrets go. It is the only way to find God's peace, God's shalom.

We must make critical choices as we unclutter.

During the era of apartheid, a noted South African clergyman wrote that at the final judgment, as we will stand before God, he will ask us, "Where are your scars?" And we will look at ourselves and then back at God and tell him, "We have no scars." God will ask us, "Was there nothing worth fighting for?" Clutter comes when we cannot find anything that is worth fighting for, those times we are not willing to make the critical choices.

To unclutter means to prepare the way of the Lord. That doesn't just happen with Christmas. This needs to be intentional on our part. It doesn't just happen by accident. The need to prepare the way of the Lord--to unclutter our lives, to focus our thinking, to be intentional--is a challenge.

The challenge is to get our lives in such order, that our hearts will be open to the ways of God. It requires a rebalancing of our lives, an evening out, making rough places smooth, straightening the crooked places in our lives. Those valleys or low places in our lives, such as worry or grief or uncertainty, can be filled with an awareness of the very presence of the living Christ. The mountains we must deal with in our hearts include pride, prejudice, fear, and selfishness. When these are brought low, we can see a greater horizon; we can see the way of the Lord.

To unclutter our lives and find the peace we long for, we need to confront those temptations that pull us away from God. To smooth the path toward God we must forgive those who have hurt us and not allow the situation to take control of our lives.

Have we been doing too much as individuals or as a church?

Have we been speaking too much rather than listening?

Have we acquired too much, are our lives too cluttered?

If it is peace we seek, then we need to make room for God in our lives. As we emerge once again from lockdown, and as we consider how best to use these new resources we have in these great buildings, we must decide what is not necessarily good but what is best. Prepare the way of the Lord John the Baptist cries out. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Amen.

Responding

Sing - Shelter (Seasons 5-32) [One License #69111]

When you feel your day is at its end,
when you pray for rest around each
bend.

When the road you walk has been too
long,
may our love keep you strong.

When the words you speak have lost
their flow
and both the sun and spirit low.
When steps are hard and shadows long,
may our love keep you strong.

*May you find your shelter in these walls.
Let us share your journey's trials and
joys.
May your feet find rest when day is long.
May the peace of God be in your song.*

When you feel that all you know has
changed,
seasons pass but truth remains.
When times of hardship come along,
may our love keep you strong.

When the light of life begins to fade,
Christ be near, in Christ proclaim.
God's mercy, grace and peace live on,
may God's love keep you strong.

*May you find your shelter in these walls.
Let us share your journey's trials and
joys.
May your feet find rest when day is long.
May the peace of God be in your song.*

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Seasons of the Spirit 5-32

Prayers of the People - Kath Merrifield

God of days gone by, and God of the here and now— we understand the story of
Zechariah.

We know what it's like to be speechless.

We know what it's like to be awestruck.

We know what it's like to change plans and leave everyone whispering.

What we don't always know is what the next right step is.

We crave your voice in our ear—guiding our steps, revealing the way.

So today, God, we pause to give you thanks for the things that leave us speechless—
for love at first sight,

for the immense ocean beside us and the mountains that wrap themselves around us,
for the moments when the doctor says the scan is clear,

for the family that runs to meet us at the airport and welcomes us home,

for every small miracle and concentrated beauty in our life— we are awestruck.

We are speechless.

We are so deeply grateful.

But in between whispers of deep gratitude, are people who are speechless for other
reasons.

We are speechless because of the suffering and despair, grief and loss, violence and
injustice in our world.

With every woman or child hurt or killed in their own home, we lose our breath.

With every threat of violence, we lose our words.

With every updated report on climate change, we lose our peace.

And the cycle goes on and on and on.

Creator God, who breathed life into us, move between us and our despair.

Give us a voice to speak gratitude in the face of beauty, and justice in the face of destruction. Give us words to heal where there is hurt and to invite where there is isolation.

There are so many things that leave us speechless, O God, but we never lose your words of love and hope. So give us courage to utter those words freely and boldly, graciously and humbly - that the people we encounter each day will know more of your love for all the world. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Offering

Health restrictions still mean that we are unable to pass round offering baskets - there is a plate by the door if you would like to contribute financially.

But our offering is never just about money, it is also about what we bring - our gifts and skills, our time and energy. So we take a moment to think about what we have heard, to consider how God might be prompting us and we commit ourselves again to serving the world for who Christ died.

God of peace,
even as the world still holds its breath, unsure of what the future might bring,
we know both your assurance and your expectation:
that in your Way we can have faith and hope.
And so we dedicate ourselves once more into that Way,
committing ourselves as the Body of Christ,
to live into that vision of our purpose,
for the sake of your Kingdom.
Use us to benefit that vision, our time and energy,
our skills and resources,
all in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 41, Resources for Advent 2, p.23

Sending

Sing - God Gives Us A Future (TIS 687)

God gives us a future,
daring us to go
into dreams and dangers
on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow
in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us,
for new life starts now.

Holy Spirit, teach us
how to read the signs,
how to meet the challenge
of our troubled times.
Love us into action,
stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life, and
find our future there.

We must leave behind us
sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning
is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit
must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight,
and the strength we lack.

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Benediction

As you leave this service, your service begins:

Comfort the homesick.

Open your doors to others.

Seek sanctuary.

Be brave enough to go home by another way.

And remember that here in this place, all are welcomed—so come back soon.

Benediction by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

And be blessed in the name of God, the source of all life and inspiration.

Be blessed in the name of the Christ whose life liberates our expectations.

Be blessed in the name of the Spirit as she breathes new life through us all. Amen.

Adapted from a blessing by Rev Keree Casey, Of Ash and Rainbows

Sing - As We Go Now (Seasons 6-6)

As we go now from this moment,

as we leave behind our time together.

May we walk with one another,

may we help each other on the way.

As we go now from this moment,

as we go into the future together.

May we treasure one another,

may we realise how precious we are.

May we realise how precious we are.

May we realise how precious we are.

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Words and Music: Stephen Fischbacher