

A Home For All (Joy)

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.*

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)

Sing: Prepare ye the way of the Lord (*Godspell*)

Sing: O come all ye faithful

O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant

O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem

Come and behold Him born the king of angels

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Sing choirs of angels, sing in exaltation,

Sing all ye citizens of heaven above

Glory to God, glory in the highest:

O come let us adore Him...

Acknowledgement of Country

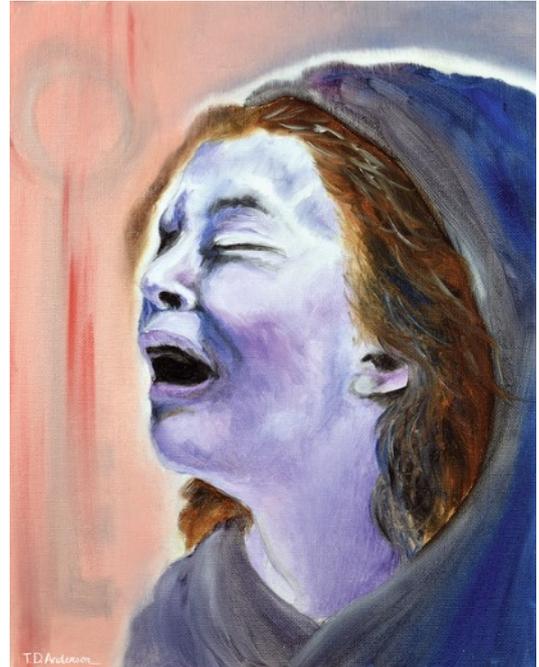
We come today carrying our own stories, remembering stories of long ago in Bethlehem, gathering on country that has held its own stories for many generations. We acknowledge the generations of story and those who are the traditional custodians, the Wadi Wadi people of the Dharawal nation, their Elders past, present and emerging.

Advent Candle of Love

Today we come and see the candles on the table,
It's as if those candles are telling the story of our journey,
of our waiting, of our seeking.

We are seeking –

Hope that fills our hearts,



Redemption Song | T. Denise Anderson

Day after day, year after year,
We light the candle of hope again.

***We are seeking—
deeper faith,
a place to belong,
the feeling that God is here in this room
and so once more we light the candle of peace.***

We are seeking—
joy that overflows,
the courage to love,
the conviction to act in the face of injustice,
So we light the candle of joy again.

We are seeking, but here in this space –

We are found. This is our sanctuary. God's love is here.

God's love is like an open door, the roof over our heads and the floor beneath our feet.

God's love is the streetlight that guides us home and a table with room for everyone.

Today we light the candle of love to remind us of the truth that God's love is a home for all,
for you and me, for neighbours and strangers.

***May this light of love burn brightly in this space and even brighter in our hearts.
Let us worship God.***

Sing - Hope is A Candle (Seasons 6-17 - v.1,2,4, 3)

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.

Joy is a candle of mystery and laughter,
mystery of light that is born in the dark;
laughter at hearing the voice of an
angel,
ever so near, casting out fear.

Love is a candle whose light makes a
circle,
where every face is the face of a friend.
Widen the circle by sharing and giving,
God's holy dare: love everywhere.

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Words: Richard Leach. Music: Traditional

Call to Confession

Mary's world turned upside down with the visit of an angel.

This is a moment we can relate to, because over the course of the last year and a half,
our world has seemed to turn upside down more than once. When those moments come,
we hope to respond with grace; but more often than not, fear can get the best of us.

So today we turn to God in prayer, asking for God's guidance and grace in the places
and moments we need it most. Let us pray together now...

Prayer of Confession

God of safe spaces, we wish we were more like Mary, who in the face of great change, went and sought help. She did not wait for help to find her; she walked to the shelter she needed. Too often we wait silently for the world to change around us instead of speaking up for the things we need. Forgive us for failing to care for ourselves the way you would care for us. Give us the courage to be more like Mary.

God of safe places, we wish we were more like Elizabeth, who greeted Mary with laughter and contagious joy. How many people have crossed our doorstep and how many times have we failed to see them? Give us the courage of Mary, and the grace of Elizabeth. Gratefully we pray, Amen.

Words of Forgiveness

Family of faith, even if we miss the person standing on our doorstep, even if we fail to care for ourselves the way God would care for us, even if we forget and ignore, turn away and shut down, God still loves us.

There is nothing we can do to lose God's love. Rest in this promise: If we get lost, we will be found. If we mess up, we are forgiven. If we withhold love, God is lavish in loving us. We are claimed. We are loved. We are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Psalm 90:1-6, 12

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust,
and say, 'Turn back, you mortals.'
For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.

Reading: Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and

blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

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!

Sing - My Soul Proclaims (Tune: Amazing Grace)

My soul proclaims the Lord, my God.

My spirit sings God's praise,

He looks on me and lifts me up,

and gladness fill my days.

All nations now will share my joy.

For Gifts God has outpoured.

This lowly one has been made great

I magnify the Lord.

For those who fear the Holy One:

God's mercy will not die,

Whose strong right arm puts down the
proud,

and lifts the lowly high.

God fills the hungry with good things,
and sends the rich away.

The promise made to Abraham,
is filled to endless day.

Then, let all nations praise our God,

The Father and the Son,

The Spirit blest who lives in us,

While endless ages run.

(Sister Anne Carter)

Prayer for Illumination

Holy God, We come to your Scripture today hoping that it will feel a bit like an open door, like Elizabeth welcoming Mary, like coming home. We want to fall into it. We want to find sanctuary here. We want to breathe easier just hearing these words. And we want to find ourselves laughing because this good news is just too good to keep inside. So hover close to us now, we pray. Open the door to our hearts so that we might find sanctuary in your words. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Reflection - the strands of love and home

Our service today has two strands running all the way through, love and home – or perhaps they are not two strands at all but just different words for the same thing. I wonder as you come to Christmas this year what those two words stir up in your heart? Some years ago now Nick & Anita Haigh wrote a song called Home, speaking of someone who has wandered the world, sharing experiences and making friends and memories, the chorus says;

'Cause home is where the heart is
Where my weary soul finds rest
And my spirit bathes in love
Where open arms surround me
Give me hope to face the world
And if home is where the heart is
Then I'm home

How would you describe home, a safe place, uplifting and welcoming. **Elder Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri**, an elder in the Presbyterian church in Puerto Rico writing about these verses in Luke says her list would include grandma's kitchen, watercolor paints, and the arms of a loved one.

If you were to let your mind wander back over your life and make a list of the places and things that look like home, what would be on your list? Wherever it is, any place where God's love dwells freely and abundantly is a sanctuary.

We're going to do something a little different this morning, Phillip is going to play something for us and as we listen can I encourage you to think about what your list would include? Perhaps close your eyes and you picture yourself there. When Phillip finishes playing you might like to take a few minutes to share with someone what those images of home and love and sanctuary are like for you today.

Going Home

Hearing the news of her pregnancy, Mary sought such a place. As a pregnant teenager, poor and unwed, dangers and uncertainty—both physical and societal—surrounded her. With haste, she journeys to Elizabeth's house. Elizabeth—and the child in her womb—welcome and affirm her.

Mary finding her home with Elizabeth bursts into a song of praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (v. 46-7). From one generation to another, God's people have written this hymn of challenge and blessing.

Hannah who comes to the Lord in such sorrow and despair sees God turn her world around. Samuel is born, Samuel who will lead God's people, the great prophet and Hannah, his mother sings of God, turning things upside down, blessing the ones the world would see as undeserving.

Zechariah, after years of waiting for a child is in the temple when God speaks to him. I can't really blame Zechariah for being doubtful, but his disbelief leads to spending months in silence unable to speak. Finally when John is born his tongue is released and he pours out his hymn of praise, the things he has discovered about God's love and faithfulness in the silence.

John years later continues the song in his own way, crying in the wilderness "prepare the way" get ready, pay attention, be open to God's leading, live lives that are honest and just, don't take advantage of others.

What about us, you and I, today, how are we writing the song for our time, for our situation?

What does it mean in your life when your soul proclaims the goodness of the Lord?

What do YOU remember-

Where and when have you rejoiced?

What did it feel like to know God's gaze was on you, that he was looking out for you, loving you, being there for you?

Tell me about his faithfulness, what are the great things you have seen - times when the powerful were brought down by grace...

For three months, that home and the arms that received Mary became her safe haven.

Elizabeth's welcome, blessing, and care were safe space, just what she needed as she prepared for the important call ahead. As Mary seeks and finds refuge in Elizabeth's embrace, she, in turn, becomes a sanctuary for God. Also known as the theotokos, Mary is the "God-bearer," the dwelling place of God. When we receive safe refuge, we have the capacity to provide sanctuary for others. Mary would give birth to Jesus and would educate him in his formative years. Mary herself was sanctuary and Jesus' first home. Sanctuary is not only a place. It is also the people who say, "Here I am," the ones who are willing to create and to become a safe place for others. Are we willing to be a refuge, someone's haven in the storm, sanctuary? That's not just a question for us individually, it's the question we, as a community of faith are called to wrestle with. In what ways are we, as a faith community providing sanctuary, becoming a space where God's love dwells freely and abundantly?

Over the last few weeks we've started talking about that in a more intentional way – where is God leading us – things have changed, we have changed, even the building has changed – where is He calling us? How do we live out love, how do we become home?

In the spirit of these two holy women, Mary and Elizabeth, may we offer ourselves as sanctuary for anyone in need of one—glorifying, with our actions, the One whose love, freely given, is our sanctuary, our home.

Responding

Offering

Elizabeth offers her home. She offers her arms. She offers her joy. She offers her affirmation and confidence. Elizabeth offers everything she has when Mary shows up at her door, and it just feels holy, doesn't it? Part of our call as people of faith is to give when and where we can. So today we are invited to be a little more like Elizabeth. Today we are invited to give generously, trusting that God will take these gifts and build a better world here. Let us give with joyful hearts.

Good and gracious God, We give these gifts for the seekers. We give these gifts for those who need sanctuary. We give these gifts for those who build sanctuaries. We give these gifts for those who have lost sanctuary, and for those who find sanctuary all over the place. Use these gifts to bring us closer to home. With joy and hope in our hearts we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Holy God, Our prayers are often one lovely act of seeking. We bow our heads, we close our eyes, and we seek— we seek you, we seek belonging, we seek sanctuary. And what is lovely is that we know, deep in our bones, that if we knock, we will find you. So today we pause our seeking to simply give you thanks.

Thank you for the Elizabeth's in our lives— the ones who have been there when we needed them most, the ones who have blessed us with joy, allowing our happiness to take up space, the ones who have opened the door for us and ushered us in. And thank you not only for the Elizabeth's in our lives, but for the strangers who have cared for us, for those older and wiser who paved the way before us, and for individuals who share no relation to us, but love us like family. Our lives are undoubtedly better because of them.

Gracious God, we also pray for those without an Elizabeth in their life. We pray for those who do not have a hand to hold in the dark, who do not have a front porch to show up on, or even a porch to call their own. We pray for those in life transitions who carry that fear and anxiety alone, and we pray for all who know loneliness in the face of these hardships. Wrap your arms around those individuals. Circle back, again and again, dwelling tenderly in the wounds of their hearts until healing might be found.

Open our eyes so that we might see the need in our own backyard. Thank you for being our safe place. Thank you for always welcoming us home. May we be that safe place, that home for others. Amen.

Sending

Sing - Let There Be Love / Create A New Heart

Let There Be Love (Scripture In Song 322)

Let there be love shared among us
Let there be love in our eyes
May now Your love sweep this nation.
Cause us oh Lord to arise
Give us a fresh understanding
Of brotherly love that is real,

Let there be love shared among us,
Let there be love.

(Dave Bilborough)

Create A New Heart (As One Voice 1/158)

*Create a new heart, holy Lord,
Beckon our lives through your word,
Open our eyes to your call,
United as one for your world.
Heighten our minds to your thoughts,
Heal us of pride and of hurt,
May we go forth in your name,
We pray our hearts change.*

The heart of the cross lowly and poor, calls us on.
Lord, it is you promising hope, promising truth.
Create a new heart, holy Lord...

Restless the hearts who yearn for your peace in this land.
Deepen the dream, justice brings life, justice redeems.
Create a new heart, holy Lord...

(Trish Watts & Monica O'Brien)

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.

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

Marion Haigh
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