

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 moving into "ordinary time".*

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



Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days breathed life into this Land and her Peoples.

From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi-Wodi people of the Yuan nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders, past and present, and pray for the future of their communities.

May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

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Call to Worship Litany (inspired by John 13:34-35)

God's people ask for signs of God's presence.

(whispered) **Emmanuel! God with us!**

From ancient times, they have called upon God for salvation.

(a little louder) **Emmanuel! God with us!**

"Shine your face upon us," they cry.

(louder still) **Emmanuel! God with us!**

And an angel said to Joseph:

(full throttle) **Emmanuel! God with us!**

Come, let us worship God.

Opening Prayer

Amazing, embodied God, whose spirit rested upon Bathsheba, on Elizabeth, on Zechariah, we praise and adore you.

Word in flesh, Emmanuel, always you are with us. We praise and adore you. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Candles

The first flame banishes darkness, inviting us to *hope*.

This second flame is to bring balance and the promise of harmony and *peace*.

The third flame is to bring delight and rejoicing - *joy!*

The fourth flame is for compassion and heart.

This is the candle of love.

Let us honour the Light!

Sing: In Full Flight

We can't quite see what tomorrow will offer.

Nothing's that clear, so little in place.

Yet, "All shall be well," the wise lady whispers;

all shall be well, a goodness to trace.

Bird in full flight,
bird on the wing.

Soaring above,
beyond on the run.

Journeys of change, vistas of wonder.

Leading to life through the heart of the One.

Wonders of birth,
pained separations.

Myst'ries too deep,
too hard to explain.

Beauty and hope
in each new day

dawning,
the presence of joy

at play once again.

Bird in full flight,
bird on the wing.

Soaring above,
beyond on the run.

Journeys of change, vistas of wonder.

Leading to life through the heart of the One.

Ev'ry day moments alive
to love's splendour.

Why turn aside for a
heaven above?

God in the laugh,
the cry and the gesture,

grace in the now,
peace through the dove.

Bird in full flight,
bird on the wing.

Soaring above,
beyond on the run.

Journeys of change, vistas of wonder.

Leading to life through the heart of the One.

Advent Prayer

In a few days' time
we will be celebrating
the birth of Christ,
so let us restore our souls,
and refresh our spirits.

**Restore us, O God,
let your face shine
that we may be saved. Amen.**

Though we are complicit
in the frenzy of consumerism,
the unreality of expectations,
the tension of gift giving,
and the pressure to attend gatherings:

**Restore us, O God,
let your face shine
that we may be saved. Amen.**

Though we would like
to be more Christ-centred
in our daily lives,
we know we can turn to God,
and be restored. So, we ask:

**Restore us, O God,
let your face shine
that we may be saved. Amen.**

We listen for God's voice

Mothers of Advent

This morning we will speak of the final two women in this series, Mothers of Advent—Bathsheba and Elizabeth. We've already heard about Mary's visit to Elizabeth, now Elizabeth has her long awaited baby.

The story of Bathsheba is not so simple, not so easy to hear and digest. Let's begin with the story of Bathsheba

Reading: 2 Samuel 11: 1-15

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. ³David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' ⁴So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

⁶ So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how

the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house, and wash your feet.' Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰When they told David, 'Uriah did not go down to his house', David said to Uriah, 'You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?' ¹¹Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.' ¹²Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, ¹³David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.'

Reflection - David and Bathsheba

Francine Rivers wrote a book based on the women in Jesus' own family tree. She called it Lineage of Grace. It told a fictional story about each, based on the bible and other available literature about Tamar and Rahab, Bathsheba and Mary. The way Francine described it, is that Bathsheba was the daughter of one of David's own generals and the granddaughter of one of David's trusted councillors...Bathsheba grew up in the camps where David lived, as he battled Saul and gathered impetus to become king of Israel. Bathsheba was beautiful and smart but a child who knew David because that's where she grew up.

But as you heard from the reading, David was besotted and wanted more. He was prepared to be deceitful and treacherous to get what he wanted. He was prepared to lie, commit adultery and send his own commander to his death, to get what he wanted. And he did, and she did.

Don't misunderstand me, David was powerful and his word was law, so here Bathsheba finds herself compromised, betrayed and abused and finds also that she must lie to those she loves in order to protect David, and herself in the end.

And yet, here they are as part of Israel's greatest lineage, a dynasty revered throughout millennia. David, as king and Bathsheba as his lover and then mother of Solomon. So revered was she, that Solomon had a chair placed beside his throne for her to act as consort. So revered is she that we still speak of her today.

And if you think this is all in the past, think again. I am going to play you a very popular song, written by Leonard Cohen called Halleluia – it is David and Bathsheba's story.

Watch and Listen: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRP8d7hhpoQ&t=15s>

Reading: Luke 1: 57-66

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰But his mother said, 'No; he is to be called John.' ⁶¹They said to her, 'None of your relatives has this name.' ⁶²Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵Fear came over all their neighbours,

and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Reflection - The birth of John the Baptist

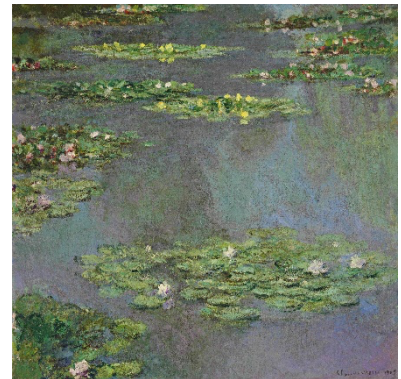
And then we hear the story of the arrival of John. Elizabeth, pious and devout, long suffering but kind and welcoming, she has lived a long life which despite the anguish of no children, now sees her deliver John. While Elizabeth is not in the direct line of Jesus, she was related to him through her cousin Mary, Jesus' mother. Elizabeth and Bathsheba, are there two more different stories to tell?

Enjoy this...

Watch and Listen: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm-2aEZKh4k&t=6s>

I have always loved Monet's waterlilies. And I think I've always liked waterlilies as you see them form on dams or in pools of water. They're fascinating, so simple looking on the top a lovely flat leaf and a fresh bright flower breaking open over the top. What we can't see from the surface is what allows them to not just survive but thrive...

These waterlilies are in the waters off the south branch of the Amazon River in northern Brazil. The pads are about a metre across, they flower several times a year, they almost look like you can walk on them. But their fragility on top hides their strength below. Their roots are embedded deep into the riverbed and their branches provide a strong connection from the roots to the leaf, where the photosynthesis takes place to feed and sustain the plant. What sits on top belies its capacity below, as an essential part of the health of the river. When we think about Bathsheba and Elizabeth, Ruth, Tamar and Rahab, what's on the surface, the flaws on the outside, belie the strength and courage that is beneath. So, I have missed all of Kath's talks on these other women, Rahab, Tamar and Ruth, but when we think about all of them together, there is something about each of them we can't ignore. Maybe it is the barren, older woman, or the young abused beauty, maybe it is the unworldly and naive woman, stranger in a strange land or perhaps the prostitute who bargained for hers and the lives of her family or the scorned and overlooked daughter-in-law who 'sold' herself for the sake of a son.



These women were fragile on the surface, they made mistakes, they spoke out of turn, they engaged in intrigue, they manipulated and bargained for themselves, they succumb to temptation, they were both victims and perpetrators, and they harboured real and very human emotions. But like the waterlilies, what sits on the surface isn't the whole story.

The whole story is about connection – the connection between the root and the leaves. In this connection, God was and is able to use flawed women and men, to fulfil his promise of a Saviour.

Ian asked me why we were talking about these women as part of the Christmas story. And some of you may think the same way but when it comes to Christmas, how many of us tell stories of our childhood Christmases, tell stories told to us by parents and grandparents of their Christmas stories (usually telling us how they only got socks and

jocks for Christmas). This is one time of the year when we tell family stories. That's who these women are, they are the imperfect ancestors of this baby we await.

While Matthew, in his gospel, describes the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to David and Solomon to Jesus, I am sure the women in that line would have been just as notable. And while Mary's genealogy would have also been impressive, it is important for us to hear and then tell these stories, it is the most inherent part of who we are as we connect to their story for ourselves. We await the birth of the Saviour of the world, who came to show us a different way of life, a life of grace, forgiveness and hope. A life spent on others as well as self, a life spent getting to know the creator of it all and through these stories come to know the extent of his love for us that we see fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

Now, here's the did you know section. While we don't know the end of the story for all these women, Tamar was the mother of Perez, and four generations later Rahab, who was the wife of Salmon, was the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, who was then mother to Obed, and great-grandmother to King David, and of course we know that Bathsheba became David's last wife and mother of King Solomon.

However, Bathsheba's story has a little more detail. Her grandfather (**Ahithophel**) was a key advisor to David before and after he became King. This man wrongly interpreted an astrological message, convincing him that he would King, by supporting an uprising by David's oldest son and once he was King, the advisor would have him tried for undisclosed crimes and have himself anointed King. However, it was his granddaughter, Bathsheba, who would become Queen. She was Queen Mother to King Solomon and was so revered by him, that he had a chair placed on the right beside his throne, at which she would sit as Consort to the King. Her story was portrayed in art, in music and in literature from as early as 1588 in a play by George Peele and most recently in 2022, in a novel 'Becoming Queen Bathsheba'.

These women, these Advent mothers, are like any of us, flawed and very human, however each learned to connect to the roots of their faith in God and through their faith were woven into God's own Christmas story. May this be our story too. Amen.

Watch YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rbR63VCTg4>

Sing: God has spoken by his prophets (Ode to joy)

God has spoken by His prophets
Spoken His unchanging Word
Each from age to age proclaiming God
The one the righteous Lord
In the world's despair and turmoil
One firm anchor holds us fast
God is King His throne eternal
God the first and God the last.

God has spoken by Christ Jesus
Christ the everlasting Son
Brightness of the Father's glory
With the Father ever one

Spoken by the Word incarnate
God of God ere time was born
Light of light to earth descending
Christ as God in human form.

God is speaking by His Spirit
Speaking to our hearts again
In the ageless Word expounding
God's own message now as then
Through the rise and fall of nations
One sure faith yet standing fast
God abides His Word unchanging
God the first and God the last.

We respond

Offering prayer

God, may these ordinary gifts of paper and card swipes, of coins and electronic transactions, honour you. May the everyday gifts of our lives honour you and the work we do in your name. Amen

Prayers of the People

In the hushed anticipation of your coming, O Lord,
kindle in us the desire to remain awake;
that we will be ready for your coming, and be eager to pray.

O God, in days to come
the mountain of your house will be established,
and your joy shall reign.

We pray for the church especially those who lead, here and everywhere, that you might teach us your ways and that we might walk in your paths.

Come Lord Jesus, **and hear our prayer.**

Out of Zion shall come forth instruction,
and you, O God, shall judge between the nations.

We pray for our nation, and all nations,
that your peace would be seen and felt in every corner of the earth.

Come Lord Jesus, **and hear our prayer.**

In your Kingdom, O Lord,
wolves lie down with lambs
and children play with serpents without fear.

We pray for the sick, the suffering,
and those in distress of any kind especially those who struggle at this time of the year.

We pray that you would heal all injuries, comfort all grief,
and settle all wrongs.

Come Lord Jesus, **and hear our prayer.**

In your Kingdom, O Lord,
even the wilderness and dry land are glad and rejoice.

We pray for those who rejoice this week, we pray for those who mourn this week, we pray for all those who are lost or alone this week, that we all might obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing might flee away.

Come Lord Jesus, **and hear our prayer.**

In the fulness of time, O God,
you sent your son, and his name is Emmanuel: God With Us.

We thank you for your Presence with us,
and we pray that you might be always present
with those whom we love but see no longer.

Come Lord Jesus, **and hear our prayer.**

Come among us O God, and hear our prayers;
so that as your Son Jesus comes among us
with great might, and in manger mild,
we might recognize his face and his voice,
and come to adore him. Amen.

~ adapted from a prayer written by Fr. Rick Morley, and posted on rick morley.

Sending out

Watch YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcFsxk1EbY4>

Hymn: Tell out my soul

Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit
voice
Tender to me the promise of His word
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice

Tell out my soul the greatness of His
Name

Make known His might the deeds His arm
has done
His mercy sure from age to age the same
His holy Name the Lord the Mighty One

Tell out my soul the greatness of His
might

Powers and dominions lay their glory by
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to
flight

The hungry fed the humble lifted high

Tell out my soul the glories of His word
Firm is His promise and His mercy sure

Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and for evermore

Closing Commission

The Trinity Restores You

(inspired by Psalm 80)

The Trinity restores you;
they make their face to shine all around you
so that you are saved.

The Father loves you;
He makes his face to shine on you
The Son graces you;
He makes his face to shine right beside you
The Spirit lives in you;
She makes his face to shine inside you

The Trinity empowers you;
they make their face to shine through you
so that others are saved.

Go out this week and love others and serve the Lord with whole and happy hearts. **Amen**

Prepared by Meredith Yabsley – Lay Preacher