

Christmas Day

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 **white or gold cloth** or scarf to signify that this is a special celebration. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Gathering

Happy Christmas!

Whether you come here often,
whether it has been a while or

whether this is new to you - welcome!

Whether your heart bursts with the love of family around you today,

or whether your heart is breaking for someone no longer here,

May the light and love of God enfold you.

Light the Christ Candle

As the writer of John's gospel assures us:

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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.

Call To Worship

Incarnation is here

in the heart of our world's living,

in the heart of our community spirit,

in the heart of this and every place.

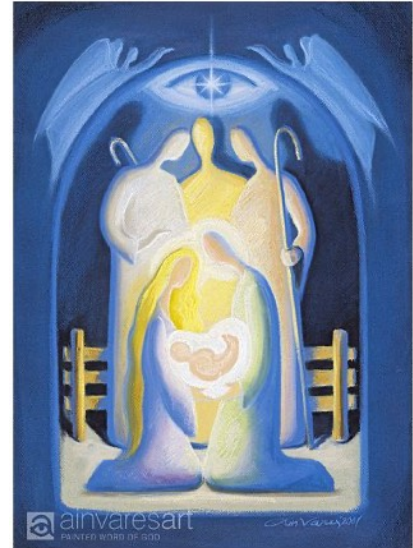
This is where Jesus is born

at the heart of it all.

Let us worship the one,

present with us and one of us.

Happy Christmas!



Candle Lighting

As we celebrate today, we tell an ancient story -
we are reminded of how it speaks to us from generation to generation.
We come to this circle of light to share in its promise.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.” (Isaiah 9:2)

The first flame banishes darkness, inviting us to hope.
The 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 - love in all its fullness.

[pause]

We pray...

On this day of days, loving God,
we gather to celebrate the wondrous gift of Jesus Christ.
Born long ago and still today,
Child of the universe present among us.
May we, in the things we do and say,
continue to give birth to the presence of the living Christ
in our world today and always. Amen.

Based on a prayer from Seasons of the Spirit, resources for Christmas Day 2022, p.87

Sing - O Come All Ye Faithful (TIS 304 - vv1,2,6,7)

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and
triumphant,
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 exultation,
sing all ye citizens of heaven above,
“Glory to God, glory in the highest!”
O come let us adore him...

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy
morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father now in flesh appearing:
O come let us adore him...

True God of true God, Light of Light
eternal,
lo, he abhors not the Virgin’s
womb;
Son of the Father, begotten not
created:

O come let us adore him...

John Francis Wade

Prayer

God of stars and angels and shepherds and sheep,
you turn night to light;
your glory shines in the deepest darkness;
your grace breaks the power that would keep us down.

You are the giver of life
and bringer of hope;
answering the yearnings of our hearts.

You point to a different way,
where justice, righteousness, and peace blossom;
where sorrow is swapped for the sounds of singing,
and where joy abides forever.

Great Giver of Gifts,
today we celebrate you.
We rejoice in this glorious day
where the blue skies and the rolling oceans join with your angels in songs of praise.
Emmanuel - God with us - we join their song - "Glory to God in the highest!"

Today, we wonder with shepherds,
rejoice with angels.
We hear again that ancient story made new in us once more
that warms our hearts
and reminds us of mercy,
fashioned in flesh and bone.

O, God,
whose glory shines upon us in this season of long summer days,
whose light flickers in the darkness and cannot be put out,
whose love warms even the coldest of hearts,
we sometimes lose our way,
our bearings,
as we journey on your path.
For the times in our lives when we fail to reflect your love in our words and in our actions:
forgive us.

For the times we diminish the light of others, pushing ourselves forward
instead of encouraging another soul to shine: forgive us.

For the times when we withhold your love from people who make us uncomfortable,
people, not like us, those whose theology or approach to living fails to meet our own self-
imposed standards: forgive us.

May the star that led the seeking Magi to Jesus re-orient us,
and lead us back to you.
May we be your people of peace,
proclaiming your kingdom of justice and righteousness
with joy, with hope, and with love in our hearts.
And may the message and love of the child in the manger
be born in us this day, we pray. Amen.

Based on a prayer, Spill The Beans, Issue 41, p.49

Listening for God's Voice

Story - Jed and Roy McCoy

Do you know who the baby is in the story?

What was going on between these two brothers? They were fighting?

What do you think helped them to be friends again? Their lives were changed when they met Jesus.

When the angels told the shepherd about Jesus, they said he was the Prince of Peace. Sometimes it is hard for us, when we get angry about something, or we don't get what we want - but Jesus teaches us to try to look out for other people and to try and find a way to get along with people, even people we don't agree with or don't like very much. And if we can do that, our world will be a much more peace-filled place.

Reading: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

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

God of Love, move among us now, softening hearts, opening ears and eyes, strengthening us and giving us courage to respond to your way of being in the world. Amen.

Why are you here this morning?

When many in our community have decided that Church is not for them, why are you here? Particularly today, of all days, when there is lunch to prepare, parties to go to, fun to be had - most of which bears no relevance to or relationship with what Church is about - or so it seems...

Maybe you have been dragged along and don't get to open your presents until you have been to church (as it was in our family for decades!).

Perhaps you know why you are here - and for that, I am grateful!

But for many of us, and I include myself every now and again, we have come because there is something in this understanding of life and faith that draws us - something that compels us. And the celebration of the birth of Jesus seems to capture some of our hopes and dreams in a way that other celebrations don't seem to.

Maybe it is about wanting to believe that light banishes darkness, that always, no matter how hard life becomes, there is always a flicker of light, a shard of hope that draws us on. Maybe it is about wanting to belong somewhere - knowing that there is something here that will embrace even me.

At Christmas time, it is easy to get caught up in the expectations of joyful celebrations, most of which seem to come at substantial financial, and often environmental, cost. And for many, the celebrations mean putting on a brave face and masking the pain of whatever life has thrown at them.

Over the past weeks, I have been contemplating the idea of “risking delight”.

Risking delight.

It recognises that joy is not just about being happy or dancing about the room, although that might be part of it.

It also recognises that naming the realities of life, particularly naming the challenges, or the things that cause us pain, lamenting injustice and weeping with people who grieve, is indeed the beginning of being able to risk delighting in the world Jesus came to love and to serve.

The writer of the gospel attributed to John doesn't bother with the stories of angels and shepherd and wise ones, or even the virgin birth. This gospel writer skips over the what and how of Jesus' birth and leaps into a much more poetic description of the why.

And in this poetic description of why, the writer points to both the light banishing darkness (John 1:5), and the naming of the way Jesus came into the world but was unrecognised and unaccepted (John 1:10-11).

And at the same time, there is this affirmation, that the one who is present at the shaping of the cosmos, dwells amongst us - the word in Greek is more like “pitches a tent” amongst us - and that anyone who turns towards this tent-pitcher is embraced, belongs, is considered family (John 1:12-13).

The writer of John's gospel is certain, that as this tent is pitched, as Jesus comes amongst us, we have seen what he calls, “the glory of God” (John 1:14). “Glory” is a way of describing a presence - the presence of God - the being of God - the embodiment that is, as John describes, “full of grace and truth”.

Perhaps too, the story of Jed & Roy taps into some of our yearning that our relationships can be restored, that we can learn to relate to one another in healthier ways, or at least we can learn to curb our own grumpiness or selfishness or our desire to win at all costs so that we can grow and stay in relationships that enable us to flourish together.

If any of that resonates with you, then I hope that you will come back again.

Or, if not here, then somewhere where you can explore more about the relationship that God invites us into (that is, that idea of dwelling amongst us) and the life to which Jesus calls us. Because I do know that as we embrace God's presence amongst us, and as we strive to embody love, grace and truth, our world, our communities, our families, our own lives flourish.

And isn't that what we long for?

Isn't that why we are here? - because we long for the flourishing of our own lives and the lives of the people around us and the creation of which we are a part. And somehow we have figured out that this story, of a baby born to an unwed teenage girl in an out-of-the-way place on the other side of the world a couple of thousand years ago, might just have something to do with the path we are looking for.

May you find in the birth of Christ, the light, the hope, the restoration and flourishing for which we yearn.

And in that discovery, may your life be shaped in such a way as to share such flourishing with the world around you.

Let us pray...

We offer you a new song, God. It is a song of thanksgiving, a song of regret, a song of passion, a song of praise, a song of lament, and sometimes it is a song of joy.

We thank you for the ways in which you hear our prayers, whatever their tone.

And we pray that as you continue to dwell amongst us, you will draw us to your grace and truth that we also might embody your love in the world. Amen.

Based on a prayer from *Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Christmas Day 2022, p.84*

Responding

Sing - Australian Light (Carols In The Sun)

This is a new Australian carol - it names our experience of Christmas and asks how we might care for others and share our home with people of all faiths.

*Christmas in Australia,
the beach, the bush, the heat,
no holly, snow or mistletoe,
just grass beneath your feet.
Bright light fills our Southern sky
just like that blazing Christmas star,
a beacon shining in the dark
to spread God's news afar.*

A child born in a stable among the cows
and sheep,
sent to teach us how to live, Jesus,
Prince of Peace.
Time with friends and family, picnics in
the sun,
love and care for those in need,
like Mary's precious son.
Christmas in Australia...

Home to many different faiths, take
another's hand.
A sacred thread to link us all,
our ancient wide brown land.
The true spirit of Christmas lives within
your heart,
for we are all God's children,
loved right from the start.
Christmas in Australia...

© Alison Davies and Heather Price

Christmas Message - Moderator - video

Before we come to a time of prayer for others, we hear a message from the Moderator of the Uniting Church in NSW and ACT, Rev Simon Hansford:

<https://ume.nswact.uca.org.au/christmas-2022/>

A message from the President of the Assembly, Rev Sharon Hollis, can be found here:

<https://uniting.church/christmasmessages2022/>

Prayers of the People (Helen Laidlaw)

God who spoke the world into being,
Jesus, Word of life,
Spirit, who lives within us:
we thank you for the power of word and story:
your story, our stories, intertwined.

On this special day

where we tell the story of stars and angels, shepherds and a stable,
of powerful empire
and the in-breaking of your kingdom in the birth of a child,
we thank you for hope,
passed as a torch,
down through countless generations.

Light of the world,
we pray for all who walk in the darkness of uncertainty and despair –
who wonder where the next meal will come from,
where they will find shelter,
where they will feel safe from harm;
who struggle to survive and wonder whether to keep on trying.

We pray for all who live in a land of deep darkness,
places where corruption and greed strangle truth and stifle justice,
places where the vulnerable and those who speak up are crushed under the heel of
the powerful.

We think today, especially, of the people of Ukraine, the Congo, and the many
places in our world where war, violence and unrest are a part of daily living.

Light of the World, break into the darkness, we pray.

Prince of Peace, soften hearts and minds to transform these places into places of
safety and peace.

In this season of celebration,
we pray for those who walk the dark valley of grief,
those who are ill and those who care for them,
those who feel invisible and alone.

Today, especially, we give thanks for all those who keep us safe as we celebrate -
for people who work in emergency services, for doctors and nurses, for people who
work in hospitality offering a place to stay for people who are travelling. And we ask
that you will watch over them today and always.

May the story of the child in the manger kindle a flame of hope and comfort,
may it be a sign of liberation,
may it lead to that deep joy which goes beyond the tinsel and the glitter and acts as
an anchor through all that life brings.

We give you thanks for the wondrous story of your coming to our level
to walk with us in the darkness,
to be our light on the way,
to show us
who you are
and what love looks like.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Based on a prayer, Spill The Beans, Issue 41, p.50

Offering - Christmas Bowl

As we have prayed, so we choose to live.

Jesus was not born in a home like ours.

He was born into poverty.

He was born into simplicity.

He was born into a manger in Bethlehem.

And despite the little he might have had, Jesus still spent the rest of his days on earth giving to others.

Generosity is in the DNA of our faith. We give what we can, not because we should or because scripture says to. We give because we're family. We give because we belong to one another.

Today we give to offer hope to some of the most vulnerable people in the world today.

All of our offering is given to the work of The Christmas Bowl / Act for Peace.

Video - Christmas Bowl:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_cyYONGh_g&list=PLqrYzj1veb8eZqdkbYW-L8h7nu4lyUza&index=7

We pray...

Gracious God,

in this season of giving and receiving

we present these tokens of money

as a sign of our commitment

to your church, your mission and your message.

Take them and use them

for your good and the good of all.

We pray especially, for the work of Act For Peace, that your love and grace will be known through the projects they facilitate and the people they encourage.

Keep the message of Christmas in our hearts all year long.

Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 45, resources for Christmas Eve/Day, p.46

Sending

Sing - Joy To The World (TIS 268)

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;

let earth receive its king;

let every heart prepare him room,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven, and heaven and nature

sing.

Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns;

let us our songs employ;

while fields and streams, rocks, hills and

plains

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,

and makes the nations prove

the glories of his righteousness

and wonders of his love,

and wonders of his love,

and wonders, wonders of his love.

Isaac Watts

Blessing

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