



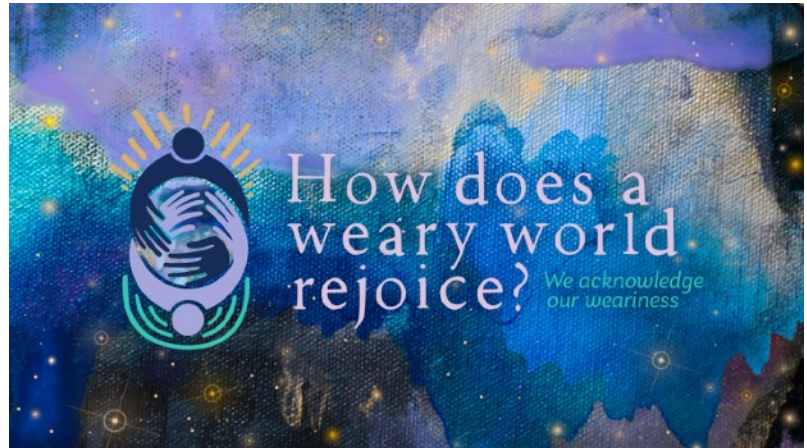
## How Does A Weary World Rejoice? We Acknowledge Our Weariness

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### Gathering

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*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** or **blue** cloth or scarf because we are now in entering a time of preparation. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God. During this season, you might also like to make a small Advent wreath - it could be as simple as 5 candles on a tray or small plate.*



### Light Candle

We light this candle...

*[Light the candle]*

And we breathe...

and we turn towards the one who is the Light of the World: Jesus the Christ.

We seek the light. We celebrate the light.

We allow ourselves to be drawn to the light.

### Sing - Hold The Light For Me (ATO 484)

Hold the light for me;

I need to see the way you're leading.

Need has brought me here;

at time I fear that you're not near me!

Jesus, you know a traveller gets weary.

Jesus, please show the signs of hope more clearly.

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### Acknowledgement of Country

In this place, where the land meets the sea, where the sea makes a noise, since time beyond our imagination, the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have cared for the land and the sea and its creatures great and small.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders:

those who have carried the sacred stories from generation to generation; those who carry the sacred stories today; and those who are learning and growing so that the sacred stories may be carried into the future.

And we pray for our future together - there is work to be done -

to build relationships that honour and respect those for whom this land is embedded in their being.

***We commit ourselves to the way of love.***

## **Introduction**

Today we begin our preparations for the celebration of Jesus' birth.

As we know, when a special celebration is approaching, we take time to prepare and get ready. Sometimes our preparations are about what guests we should invite, or what food needs to be prepared. For us, as followers of Jesus, the preparation is more about what we need to do to prepare our hearts, our minds, our souls - what work do we need to do as individuals and as a community to reshape ourselves to be more like the One whose presence we welcome every moment of our living.

In these coming weeks, we are going to explore the first 2 chapters of the gospel attributed to Luke. You might want to take time to read through these chapters again.

And we will explore the question of how does a weary world rejoice?

As we begin to engage with that question today, we consider how we acknowledge our weariness and how we hold weariness and joy together.

## **Call to Worship**

*In God's house, we can be joyful.*

***We can be grateful. We can be hopeful.***

*In God's house, we can be weary.*

***We can be anxious.***

***We can be grieving.***

*In God's house, we can be honest—*

***inspired or tired,***

***delighted or doubtful,***

***connected or curious,***

***and everything in between.***

*This is God's house. You are welcome exactly as you are.*

***Let us worship our loving God.***

## **Opening prayer**

Loving God, the source of our joy,  
as we turn our hearts toward your Word, we ask that you would soften us.

Soften the callouses on our hearts.

Weave yourself in between the cracks in our spirits.

And plant hope where there is room.

And as you do this,

like flowers toward the sun,

we will turn ourselves toward you,

eager to hear a Word so good that we cannot help but ask ourselves, "How can this be?"

With openness and gratitude we pray,

Amen.

**Sing** - Sing of The Lord's Goodness (TIS 183, vv1,3,4)

*We sing of God's goodness and encourage one another to sing God's praise..*

Sing of the Lord's goodness,  
Father of all wisdom,  
come to him and bless his name.  
Mercy he has shown us,  
his love is forever,  
faithful to the end of days.

*Come then, all you nations,  
sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
Ring out the Lord's glory,  
praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.*

Courage in our darkness,  
comfort in our sorrow,  
Spirit of God most high;  
solace for the weary,  
pardon for the sinner,  
splendour of the living God.  
*Come then, all you nations...*

Praise him with your singing,  
praise him with the trumpet,  
praise God with the lute and harp,  
praise him with the cymbals,  
praise him with your dancing,  
praise God till the end of days.  
*Come then, all you nations...*

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### **Candle Lighting**

*The Advent wreath, like our Advent calendars, is an invitation to mark the days or weeks as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth.*

*Each Sunday before Christmas we light another candle - each inviting us to ponder an aspect of God's coming amongst us - hope, peace, joy and love.*

*Today we light the candle of hope. How does a weary world hope?*

***By telling stories of hope,  
by lighting candles in the night,  
and planting seeds in the winter that will bloom in the spring;***

By praying for children as they grow, and picking up rubbish on the footpath.

***By insisting that small acts can make a difference.***

There are a million ways to practice hope.

So today we light the candle of hope as a reminder and a charge.

***With God's help, may we bring hope into a weary world. Amen.***

**Prayer** - drawn from Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

*The first part of our prayer is drawn from Psalm 80 and includes a response on the screen.*

*The second part has some more full responses.*

*Let us pray...*

Shepherd of Israel, hear us today,  
you who leads us, nurtures us and watches over us,  
you who created all that we know and so much more we are yet to comprehend.

Spirit of Life, stir the air,  
move among us,  
shake us out of complacency.

<sup>3</sup> Restore us, O God;

***let your face shine, that we may be saved.***

God, we look around the world,  
and we see so many who weep - for family and friends lost to violence and war, natural disaster and preventable illness.

We try to choose a different path but so often get lost in the lure of the world's way.

<sup>7</sup> Restore us, O God:

***let your face shine, that we may be saved.***

Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus  
the one you sent to show us your way of love,  
the one who's way leads to life.

<sup>19</sup> Restore us, O God;  
***let your face shine, that we may be saved.***

Gracious God, we are weary.  
For weary bodies that ache and cry out, we pray:  
***Forgive us for pushing ourselves too hard.***  
***Remind us that we need Sabbath rest.***

For weary minds that feel overwhelmed and saturated with news, we pray:  
***Forgive us for creating so many distractions.***  
***Remind us that in the quiet, we can hear you.***

For weary hearts that long to feel the joy of this season, we pray:  
***Forgive us for being impatient with ourselves.***  
***Remind us that healing takes time, and that joy and grief can coexist.***

For the weary edges of our faith that struggle to hold onto hope,  
***Forgive us.***  
***Remind us of Zechariah and Elizabeth.***  
***Remind us that your good news knows no bounds.***

<sup>19</sup> Restore us, O God;  
***let your face shine, that we may be saved. Amen.***

### **Words of Assurance**

Family of faith,  
no matter how many times we wear ourselves thin,  
no matter how many times we lose ourselves to distractions,  
no matter how many times we ask ourselves, "How can this be?"  
God's love keeps showing up for us.  
So say this with me:  
***We are loved. We are claimed. We are forgiven.***  
***Thanks be to God. Amen.***

**Sing** - Song of Hope (Seasons 2-34)  
*We sing another song to encourage us...*

Just when our hope was defeated  
clear was the voice of the Spirit:  
"See how your brothers have not given up  
in the struggle to better the world.  
See how your sisters have not given up in  
the struggle to better the world."

*God is uplifting the people.*  
*God is the power within us.*  
*Hope is our music and freedom our*  
*song*  
*and together our voices will ring.*

Just when our hope was defeated  
clear was the voice of the Spirit:  
"Reach out to all of your brothers and build  
with each other, a world of peace.  
Reach out to all of your sisters and build  
with each other, a world of peace."  
*God is uplifting the people...*

Just when our hope was defeated  
clear was the voice of the Spirit:  
"I will be with you and I will uplift you and  
give you the strength to endure.  
I will be with you and I will uplift you and  
give you the strength to endure."  
*God is uplifting the people...*

*Words and Music: Ester Camac and Edwin Mora Guevara*  
*English translation: Bret Hesla*  
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## Listening for God's Voice

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### Reading: Luke 1:1-23

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup>I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

<sup>5</sup> In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup>Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. <sup>7</sup>But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

<sup>8</sup> Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, <sup>9</sup>he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. <sup>10</sup>Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. <sup>11</sup>Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. <sup>14</sup>You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup>for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup>He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' <sup>18</sup>Zechariah said to the angel, 'How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.' <sup>19</sup>The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. <sup>20</sup>But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.'

<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. <sup>22</sup>When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realised that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. <sup>23</sup>When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

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

Let us pray...

Living God,

come among us, we pray, as we open ourselves to the stories of your coming among us in the person of Jesus.

Open our eyes to see you at work in the world.

Open our ears to hear the cries of people who are struggling.  
Open our hearts and hands to respond with generous love. Amen.

The first chapter of the gospel attributed to Luke, beginning the account of Jesus' life, invites us into our preparations for celebrating Jesus' birth.

A few months ago, when began thinking and preparing for for this time, the conflict in Israel and Palestine had just begun, not long before there had been floods and earthquakes in northern Africa and Afghanistan, our nation had rejected the invitation of its First Nations peoples to walk with them - and, well, "weary" is a good word to describe how many of us were feeling. And since that time, well, conflict, natural disaster, climate concerns, the fall out from the referendum, and a billion other things continue to try to suck joy from our living.

So to ask, "how does a weary world rejoice?" seemed like an important question to ask and to wrestle with.

Of course, the words come from a line in the well-known Christmas hymn, "O Holy Night," - "A thrill of hope- the weary world rejoices" - which itself has an interesting history. The song was originally written in French by a French poet who was atheist, and the music was supplied by a Jewish composer. The hymn was later translated into English by an American Unitarian minister. In the 1800s, it became a popular hymn for Christian abolitionists due to its justice-focused language in the last verse:

*Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.  
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;  
Let all within us praise His holy name.*

But what is joy? What does it mean to rejoice?

That's a question I hope you will ponder over the coming weeks.

I think there are lots of ways to think about joy and what it means to rejoice.

To start our thinking, I want to say joy is not just about being "happy clappy".

Perhaps it is about knowing, deeply, that this is where you are meant to be and that you are loved.

Perhaps, then, joy is more related to the other elements we name when we light the Advent candles - hope, peace and love - than it is to being upbeat all the time or laughing raucously.

The hymn reminds us that joy and justice belong together and that sometimes our joy is an act of resistance. That is a theme that we see often in the scriptures - we will see it again in a couple of weeks when we hear Mary's song at the news she is expecting a child, and we hear it in Psalm 80, which we touched on earlier in our prayers.

What it invites us into is the reality that joy is rarely an isolated emotion - rather joy sits among and with our grieving and our fear.

In the reading we heard from Luke 1, we meet Elizabeth and Zechariah. They are a faithful, older couple, living in a time and place where life is generally hard.

They live under the rule of a foreign government and the oversight of its occupying army, a people who do not respect their religion or its rituals and customs, let alone the God they worship.

Zechariah is a priest. Elizabeth is of the tribe of Aaron (1:5).

Together they have lived with infertility (1:5), and the innuendo that comes with being childless in a culture that places great emphasis on the passing on of faith from generation to generation.

Yet they have lived faithfully (1:6) and they are now getting old (1:7).

I wonder whether how they felt - perhaps it was like many of us, deep gratitude for what we have, but perhaps also a sense of grief for what has not been.

And then one day, an angel appears to Zechariah - which, unsurprisingly, I think, terrifies him - before the angel tells him that Elizabeth is going to have a child (1:13) and that this would bring him joy (1:14).

But the angel doesn't stop there - along with an instruction to name the child, John (1:13), and to make sure he never touches alcohol (1:15), the angel goes on to say a little of what this child will do: he will be filled with the Holy Spirit (1:15); and he will call people to God (1:16-17).

Again, unsurprisingly, Zechariah has a few questions, he wants more information, but apparently it ought to have been enough that the angel said so, as Zechariah is then unable to speak until the birth of his son (1:20) - which is enough to convince the people who were waiting outside that he had indeed had a vision or encounter with God in some way (1:21-22).

And I love how this part of the story ends simply with "When his time of service was ended, he went to his home" (1:23). I wonder how he told Elizabeth about his encounter - slowly writing in the sand (assuming they could both read and write), hand signals, charades?! And I wonder what she had to say about it?

Fear, scepticism, disbelief, joy.  
They exist together.  
Strangely, perhaps, curiously...

Silence and waiting as life goes on...  
This is our experience too.

Those of us who know what it is to weep for a loved one, to worry, to care, know that there are moments when in the midst of it all we find ourselves smiling - remembering a precious moment, or seeing something beautiful, catching a glimpse even momentarily of the wonder of God's love and grace.

In the weariness of grief and struggle, the depth of God's grace is known.

For those of us who feel deeply the pain of a world where violence is used to settle differences, where the climate cries out for attention, where people are used, abused and exploited, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and no-one seems to care - we go about our lives, here in this beautiful place, we enjoy the company of friends and family, and we try to engage where we can - we write letters to our politicians, we show up for protests, we donate to organisations alleviating suffering in places we will never see or know, we stop long enough to hear the pain of our friends and neighbours when they are struggling, we open our homes and tables to those who are hungry for food or company.

For those of us who know what it is to live with mental health challenges - anxiety, depression or trauma - sometimes the darkness feels impenetrable, and the effort it takes to function is exhausting.

And sometimes our grief, our struggles are difficult to express.



There are no words.  
Silence is our reality.  
Waiting is our reality - as life goes on around us.

As a community, how do we hold one another in grief, as we struggle, in the silences, in the waiting?

Do we leave our brothers and sisters to struggle alone?

Or do we draw alongside and sit with one another in the silence and the waiting?

How does a weary world rejoice?

We remember that joy is never an isolated emotion.

And so we are brave enough to name our weariness, to name the struggles that wear us down, we offer them to God and we share our burdens with one another.

Maybe we realise that we need to stay silent for a time and to simply listen and wait - trusting that God is with us and will not abandon us.

And so we listen and wait together - in hope, in love, in peace, in expectation, and in joy - knowing we are where we need to be and deeply, deeply loved.

### **Affirmation of Faith**

***We believe in a God who hears our prayers,  
who knows the shape and form of our weariness.***

***We believe in a God who wants joy and delight for us,  
not just survival and existence.***

***We believe in a God who looks ahead,  
who is not done dreaming for the world -***

***a God who sends hope in the form of people and change, movements and Spirit.  
And so we return to this space.***

***We bring our joy and our weariness  
like two sides of the same coin,***

***and we trust that God is already at work.***

***Yes, we believe in a God who hears our prayers.***

***Thanks be to God for a love like that.***

***Amen.***

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### **Responding**

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#### **Video - Sing It True**

<https://vimeo.com/885757734>

*We will hear this song a few times in the coming weeks. It speaks of holding on to hope, of holding grief and joy together, and of God coming amongst us, and of continuing to sing God's song in all times and places.*

#### **Prayer for Others** (Michele Broad)

In Advent we prepare for the coming of Jesus. Coming again, afresh, into our world, into our lives and our neighbour's lives, and into the complexities of this world. We prepare our hearts to be open and trusting that God is present and cares profoundly for all that is happening in the world.

O God of infinite mystery, your presence encircles us with love

And we pause in wonder and gratitude for this gift.....this grace.....



May this simple circle of our relationship with you, open our hearts to men, women and children in need and to your Vision of a world where we love you, Our Lord God, and love others as we love ourselves, bringing peace, justice and human dignity to all.

A wreath is also a circle; a timeless symbol of unity and inclusivity. The circle of life! Our circle of friends. God neither beginning nor end.

We hang wreaths, circles for welcoming, adorning our doors, inviting guests to enter in a spirit of hospitality. We pray for all those who may not have family and friends to welcome them and shower them in precious love and joy. May there be greater community awareness and generosity to the lonely and isolated, those experiencing hardship, those less able for many reasons to protect and provide for themselves.

God of wisdom, a circle can include others..... and yet it can also exclude some. Help us to see when our actions close ranks with the familiar and exclude others. Help us to expand our circles. Lord be with those who feel rejected, left out, perhaps abandoned. May they be filled with your presence and your peace beyond understanding.

Our desire is to shape a circle ever wider-  
Welcoming our own strengths and struggles, wonder and weaknesses.  
Welcoming those who are different from us.  
Welcoming the wisdom of our land.  
Welcoming those fleeing violence, persecution and oppression.  
Welcoming those ignored by our world.

No-one is invisible to you, God Almighty... May we help to build the world of your vision...  
peace, justice and dignity to all.  
Amen.

### **Offering**

*As we have received, so we consider our response...*

*We make space now to think about what we have heard and seen today and consider our response to God's nudging today.*

Loving God,  
you have given us everything we could possibly need to live well  
on this beautiful, fertile, fragile planet which is both our temporary home  
and a sacred trust, demanding our care.  
We have eyes with which to see the world's beauty, and consciousness with which to appreciate it.  
We have material resources and creative minds, and hands with opposable thumbs.  
We have language with which to communicate,  
and hearts equipped to love the other living creatures with whom we share our planet.  
Most of all, and best of all,  
we have your promised presence with us, always and everywhere;  
not just in the person of Jesus,  
but most tangible there.  
Accept these gifts as a sign of our gratitude, and our longing to walk by his side and follow  
in his ways. Amen.

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## Sending

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**Sing** - There's A Breeze Of Hope A-Blowing (tune: TIS 276)

*As we move into the rest of our day, we sing another song of hope...*

There's a breeze of hope a-blowing,  
there's a stirring of the soul.  
There's a love that knows no limits;  
it renews and makes us whole.  
There's a journeying together,  
there are joys and pains to share;  
and the One whom we all follow  
is the One who says, "I care."

There are many who are different,  
those with whom we disagree,  
there are those we judge as guilty  
who no longer should be free,  
There are those whom we might banish  
who have lost their right to live;  
but the One whom we all follow,  
is the One who says, "Forgive."

For the lonely and the failure  
there are many hurts to bear.  
For the sick and for the homeless,  
for the ones who cringe in fear,  
for the ones who feel rejected,  
those who think they're always wrong,  
there's the One whom we can follow  
who shows how we can be strong.

We are salt to give the flavour  
and a light upon the stand.  
We are set upon a hill  
and we are seen throughout the land.  
So our love must be inclusive  
given fully, given free;  
for the One whom we all follow  
shows what love can do and be.

© George Stuart *Singing A New Song*.

### Sending

*Family of faith,  
as you leave this place,  
you go into a weary world—  
so speak tenderly.  
Do the good that is yours to do.  
Choose connection.  
Hold onto hope.  
And remember that Christ took on flesh for you.  
You are God's beloved.  
So go rejoicing.  
The world needs it.*

### Blessing

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*

Liturgy adapted from material from:  
SanctifiedArt, *How Can A Weary World Rejoice*,

Rev Kath Merrifield  
3 December 2023