



How Does A Weary World Rejoice? We Find Joy In Connection

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** 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.



Video - Sing It True

<https://vimeo.com/885757734>

This song 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.

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.

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.

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.

Call to Worship

Family of faith, one of the greatest joys of worship is that it is not a solo act.

We gather together.

We find joy, and God, in the act of connection.

So as we begin our worship, I invite you to turn and face someone you are close to so that you can see one another.

(Pause as people get in position.)

Now repeat these phrases after me - speak them to the person/the people you are with:

Welcome to worship.

I am glad you're here.

Surely God is in this space.

I see God in your face.

Let us worship together.

Opening prayer

Holy God, we know that you are near.

We know that you are standing at the door,

you are running down the footpath,

you are inviting us in - into your Word, into relationship, and deeper into joy.

So as we approach your Word, O God, we pray: do not let us pass you by.

Do not allow distraction or doubt to get the best of us.

Do not let us walk down this road without you.

Instead, give us the wisdom to turn and run your way.

Give us the wisdom to hear your wisdom,

to let it sink into our bones and change us.

With hope and gratitude we pray, amen.

Sing - Your Peace Will Make Us One

The tune to this song will be very familiar but the words we sing have been re-imagined by Audrey Assad, a song-writer from the USA.. So I want to invite you - rather than leaping in - to listen to how the music group is offering it. Rather than a triumphant, "trampling" hymn, it is a song of praise, and it breathes the glory, the presence, of God in our midst.

Mine eyes have seen the glory
of the coming of the Lord!
You are speaking truth to power,
You are laying down our swords,
Replanting every vineyard
'til a brand new wine is poured,
Your peace will make us one.

I've seen you in our home fires
burning with a quiet light.
You are mothering and feeding
in the wee hours of the night.
Your gentle love is patient,
You will never fade or tire,
Your peace will make us one.

Glory glory hallelujah!
Glory glory hallelujah!
Glory glory hallelujah!
Your peace will make us one.

In the beauty of the lilies
You were born across the sea,
with a glory in your bosom
that is still transfiguring,
dismantling our empires
till each one of us is free,
Your peace will make us one.

Glory glory hallelujah!...

Audrey Assad
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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.

So today, we relight the candle of hope.

And we light the candle of peace.

How does a weary world practice peace?

By listening before we speak and saying sorry when we need to.

By advocating for justice and caring for our neighbour.

By practicing Sabbath and forgiving seventy times seven.

By choosing grace over hate and opening the door for each other.

There are a million ways to practice peace.

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

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

Prayer

God of today and God of tomorrow,

We come to you today

to thank you for the way that joy binds us together.

Thank you for contagious laughter,

for inside jokes,

for stories around dinner tables that can make us laugh until we cry.

Thank you for comedy shows,

for the familiar sound of a loved one's chuckle,

and for the universality of smile lines.

What a gift you have given us.

Our text today reminds us that joy is better when shared, so today we thank you in particular for the Elizabeths and the Marys in our lives.

Thank you for the people who spark joy in us.

Thank you for the people who pull us out of our shells,

who teach us how to dance and show us how to laugh.

Thank you for those who declare to us, "Blessed are you."

In a moment of gratitude, we silently lift their names to you now.

Moment of silence for the naming of our joy-bearers.

Holy God, although we know that joy is better when shared, there are days when that is easier said than done. Like Elizabeth, who stayed in isolation for months after receiving her good news, we too have a tendency to choose fear over joy. Without the help of someone at our door, we can often keep our joy to ourselves.

So gracious God,

when those days come,

when the waters of fear rise,

when isolation steals our joy,

comfort us.

Comfort us like a shepherd with their flock.

Gather us into your arms and carry us to safer ground
that we might experience joy in the ways you have in store for us.
And until that promised day,
like Mary and Elizabeth,
we will do our best to keep finding one another.
Like Mary and Elizabeth,
we will do our best to open the door to one another, to you, and to the joy that connection
brings. Amen.

Confession / Lament

Family of faith, one of the ways we find joy in a weary world is through connection.
The prayer of confession is a place of connection with God.
In the prayer of confession we get to come before God with our full, messy, honest selves -
not only to name the times we have not lived up to our call to discipleship and relationship
with the living Christ, but sometimes, too, to name the brokenness of our world, the things
over which we have no control but that make us sad. Then our confession is more like a
lament where we cry to God for wisdom, for strength, to know how to respond when the
way is unclear.
And in the midst of all that messiness, God tells us that we are loved, claimed, and
forgiven. God reminds us that God is always with us.
And that's where our joy begins.
So I want to invite you into a time of silence -
name what you need to - your own pain, brokenness or failings,
perhaps too, the brokenness of the world around us.

[silence]

*And now, let us listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah, speaking to the people of Israel in
exile - they think they have lost everything - their land, their homes, their connection to
God... This passage, for our Jewish brothers and sisters, is read on the Jewish Day of
Mourning, Tisha B'Av, a day when they remember times when their peoples have suffered
greatly - when temples were destroyed, times they were expelled from various nations,
and the Holocaust in the 1940s. Today we hear it when that part of the world is on fire
once more, and in the midst of our own struggles and challenges.*

Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.
3 A voice cries out:
'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
4 Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,

- and the rough places a plain.
- ⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'
- ⁶ A voice says, 'Cry out!'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
- ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
- ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.
- ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'
- ¹⁰ See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
- ¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Sing - Comfort, Comfort (TIS 647)

And now let's sing those words. As we do, imagine yourself singing these words to a friend who is struggling, or if that friend is you, imagine yourself singing them to yourself. Again, it is not intended that we belt these words out, they are offered as words of comfort to those who are hurting...

*Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.*

Though your tears be rivers running,
though your tears be an ocean full,
though you cry with the hurt of living:
comfort, comfort.
Every valley shall be lifted,
every mountain shall be low,
every rough place will be smoother:
comfort, comfort.
Chorus...

Though your eyes see only darkness,
though your eyes can see no light,
though your eyes see pain and sorrow:
comfort, comfort.
Every night will have its morning,
every pain will have an end,
every burden will be lightened:
comfort, comfort.
Chorus...

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 1:24-45

²⁴ After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ²⁵'This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.'

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.' ³⁸Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

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...

God of surprises,

help us to open our hearts and minds and to be surprised by you once again.

As we hear familiar stories,

may they speak to us in new, fresh and surprising ways today,

reaching into our struggles

and releasing joy to sustain and encourage us and the people we encounter. Amen.

Two women, both expecting a child, both in surprising ways.

One is older - never thought she would be able to have a child.

One is much younger - not yet married, and so not yet OK for her to be expecting a child.

Both uncertain, perhaps apprehensive - not just about their children forming in their wombs, but about how people around them are responding. Elizabeth, since discovering herself to be pregnant, has remained in isolation (1:24). Even though she says this baby has taken away her “disgrace” at being thought to be barren (1:25), she has remained secluded for 5 months. Mary, receives news from the angel and she is perplexed (1:29) and at the angel’s invitation, seeks out her older cousin (1:39).

When life throws you a curve ball - who do you seek out?

The geographic layout of ancient Israel is not all that clear, but scholars think that Mary had some distance to travel to see Elizabeth. Thankfully today we have email and phones and FaceTime so we don’t have to travel to connect with those who can offer us support and wisdom and encouragement. But do we? Do we ask for help? Many of us, I know, have spent a lifetime learning how to be independent. Perhaps we are like Elizabeth, hiding away, removing ourselves from our friends and family - or worse, just hiding whatever it is that we are struggling with.

But then Mary shows up!

I doubt she sent a message on ahead - no emails in those times and letters weren’t common - so she just shows up!

And at this point, we don’t know how Elizabeth knows that Mary is pregnant.

And the text doesn’t tell us whether Elizabeth has made her pregnancy known (remember, she has been in seclusion for 5 months).

We just know that when they meet - there is joy!

Joy between the women, and even Elizabeth’s baby leaps for joy (1:41, 44).

Their predicament, their shared unknowns in facing first-time pregnancy questions, their shared joy in expectation at the coming children - shared and held together.

What a great catch-up that must have been! Both of them with incredible stories to tell, and with the weight of expectation and society’s judgment to hold.

Held together in shared struggle and joy and expectation.

But these are not the only 2 women in our readings today.

And I can guarantee you missed the other one as have scholars and translators for centuries. It is clear in the Hebrew, but omitted in our English translations - the herald of hope, the herald bringing good tidings in Isaiah 40:9 is a woman! ¹

In Mark’s gospel, this herald is identified with John, the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah - the voice of the one crying in the wilderness (40:3).

But there is no doubt that in the Hebrew language, this voice is the voice of a woman who fearlessly announces the presence of God (40:9).

Here is a woman who climbs a mountain, calling to the cities of Judah, finding a firm footing and calling, proclaiming God’s hopeful, holy message to all the world gathered at her feet.

Again, there is an acknowledgement that this path is not easy.

“Do not fear” rings in her ears - as it does for Mary and Elizabeth.

Here is another solitary women, fighting an uphill battle, afraid - but brave.

¹ Australian Jewish Rabbi - unnamed to protect her safety at this time, <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/awp/episodes/144--An-Australian-Rabbi-preaches---10-December-2023-e2co5nt>

Can you see yourself in her?

And by the time we get to the end of Isaiah 40, she is reminding us that God gives strength to the weary (40:29) and hope so we can soar like eagles (40:31).

There are many in our community who are isolated and alone.

Many find themselves facing their struggles on their own.

But Elizabeth and Mary, and Isaiah's herald of hope, remind us that in sharing our challenges, in making connections with one another, there is strength and there is joy.

Around this table, we connect with each other and with God.

As we share together, may you be strengthened, may you know joy, may you also be a herald of hope for your family, for your friends, for your community.

Let us pray...

God of laughter, God of open front doors and family reunions,
so often we, too, doubt good news.

Remind us again that joy is amplified when shared.

Open our hearts to healing of past hurts

and teach us how to throw open our doors like Elizabeth.

Show us how to find joy in connection. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

***We believe that joy is a sacred gift,
existing on a plane deeper than happiness,
stemming from the truth that we belong to God.***

We believe that joy is not meant for isolation.

Joy is meant to be shared,

weaving us together in laughter and in hope.

And when joy feels impossibly out of reach,

we believe that part of being sacred community is leaning on one another.

So together we say:

I will share my joy when yours runs out.

You will share your joy when mine runs out.

And in doing so, we will all see God. Amen.

Responding

Prayer for Others (Narelle Dempster)

God of faithful grace and goodness,

we give thanks for the words of hope and comfort that echo down the centuries

from Isaiah to John the Baptist,

from Jesus of Nazareth through Luke the gospel-writer, through translators, and publishers
and printers to us here today.

"Comfort them," the prophet is told,

"tell them that they have suffered long enough, their sins are forgiven".

And so he does, so she does, so they do.

Faithful God, may we be open to hear your word, and daring enough to look in unlikely
places for signs of your presence.

May we be wise enough to discern which of the many voices that we hear speaks for you,
and brave enough to pass on the radical good news that we hear.

As John spoke from a barren, desert place to people on the margins, far from the centres of power, so we pray for those who live on the margins now, their births uncelebrated; their deaths not publicly grieved.

We pray for refugees and asylum-seekers; for clients of food banks in this country, and for others who lack even that safety net. We pray for those whose fragile hold on coping has been shaken by the ongoing effects of Covid: those without secure jobs or money in the bank; those for whom home is not a place of safety; students without loving parents to go back to; old people without children to look out for them.

We pray for those in positions of power, the best of whom feel powerless, and admit it; troubled by the huge responsibility that they bear.

We continue to walk with our First Nation neighbours as they continue to emerge from their silence and dig deep yet again to search for the way forward towards their rightful place recognition and reconciliation with Second Nation people. Give us courage to speak up and stand with them with respect and dignity and to stand against the ongoing racism that some continue to experience.

We pray for friends and family members affected by sorrow or illness.

So we hold before you in silence those people and situations you've laid upon our hearts
{silence...}

May this time be an opportunity for all of us to reassess what really matters, and what sort of world we want to live in.

May our vulnerability create a crack through which your light can shine, as the solid ground of our confidence is shaken, may a tiny mustard-seed of faith drop in, and your kingdom have a chance to grow.

God, in just such times as these have you sent your prophets to challenge the powerful and comfort the oppressed. In just such times as these have you slipped in alongside your people to let them know that they are not alone, for you are with them.

Lord, without you we can do nothing. Keep us humble and teachable as we share in your work of healing and transformation in this place. Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 37, Resources for Advent 2, p.22

Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

Offering

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

We were made for joy. Connection to God, ourselves, friends and family, and even to creation help us to experience the depth of joy.

As we're reminded that Jesus breaks into our weary world to bring us joy and peace, let us offer our gifts to God now, so that God's joy and peace may overflow and help our weary world rejoice.

God of peace, thank you for the ways you break into our weary world with a joy that reaches far beyond anything the world can offer. We ask your blessing upon these gifts that they may help us to share your peace with the world.

Bless each of us, that we may be vessels of your joy-filled light in our weary world. Amen.

Rev. Jessica Baldyga

Sending

Sing - Look Towards Christmas (Seasons 5)

And so we go singing another song of joy - looking towards the celebration of Jesus' birth...

Look toward Christmas!
Advent is here:
welcome December
changing the year.
Whistle up, shepherds!
Saddle up, kings!
Chorus up, angels, flexing your wings.
Sing, sing alleluia!
sing, sing alleluia!
Sing, sing out the story,
sing about hope and peace.

Set the world singing,
make the world glad;
now is good reason
not to feel sad!

Hear John the Baptist
shout to prepare:
Good News is coming,
earth be aware.
Sing, sing alleluia!...

Mary and Joseph,
soon is the day:
ready the donkey,
start on your way.
You are the chosen,
willing to trust,
joyful your burden,
carrying Christ.
Sing, sing alleluia!...

*Words © Shirley Murray
Music © Jillian Bray*

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
10 December 2023