



For all those back at work and catching public transport again – for happier times

## **Train Passengers sing ‘Somewhere over the Rainbow’**

### **The liberators International 2015**

32 million have watched this! This Christmas - Claim back your joy!

<https://youtu.be/xctzp0dp9uc>

### **Welcome and Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge those who were here before us, the first inhabitants of this place  
We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.

### **Call to Worship**

A voice calls out in the wilderness.

**It sings of a home for all. It speaks of justice and peace.**

We could choose to ignore it.

**We could drown out that song. We could choose not to listen.**

Instead, we come into this space.

**We let the world grow quiet.**

**We listen.**

A voice calls out in the wilderness. Do you hear it?

**We hear it. In listening, we worship.** Let us draw near to God.

### **Candle Lighting Liturgy**

A: Joy is seeing people you love after months apart.

B: Joy is hearing, “Come on over, it has been too long!”

A: Joy is the stretches and giggles of a newborn child.

B: Joy is making it home when the journey is long.

A: Joy is your dog sliding to meet you at the door.

B: Joy is the energy of a new season.

A: Joy is feeling found when you thought you were lost.

B: So today we light the candle of joy, because the welcome God has for us is nothing short of joyful.

A: Rest in that good news. Let it wash over you.

B: For we are close to home. Amen.

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### **Prayers of Adoration and Invocation**

Lord our God,

Open our hearts to the song you sing for us, help us see you amongst us this advent calling us to be a joyful people.

For you Lord rejoice and sing a song for us, you help us rejoice and put a song on our lips. You lift us out of the darkness, into the light and give us life and that life fills us with joy.

Jesus Christ our Lord,  
 you came amongst us, to lift up our hearts and set us free.  
 As we prepare our hearts for your coming this Christmas prepare our hearts so we may live in your ways  
 where we are alive in you and bear much fruit for God's glory.

Holy Spirit,  
 You fill us with the fire of God's love  
 You gift us with the fruits of the Spirit  
 You help us live out our faith  
 Loving God and others as ourselves  
 You help us reach out into the world to bless and leave a legacy that brings life  
 Come Holy Spirit, Come  
 Help us know the fire of God's love in our hearts and in the lives of others.  
 Help us reach out with love.

### Call to Confession

May we channel some of John the Baptist's courage to tell the truth about ourselves and our world. We do not do this to shame ourselves or guilt ourselves for being imperfect. We speak the truth out loud because we know that we cannot grow and change without first being honest. So let us be brave. Let us be bold. Let us be truth-tellers as we confess together now to a God who couldn't love us any more than God already does. Let us pray

### Prayer of Confession

**Expansive God,**

**We know that the church is your house, and your house has room for everyone.**

**Yet, too often, instead of setting the table for our neighbours, we block the door. Instead of welcoming all, we judge others by our own standards. Instead of sharing our second coat, we hide it in the attic, holding on to fear instead of letting go with love. Remind us that your home is a home for *all*, that truth requires hard work, that truth requires uncomfortable justice. Help us to be bold enough to see it and brave enough to live it. With hope we pray, amen.**

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### Readings

#### Luke 3:1-18

**3** In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler<sup>[a]</sup> of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler<sup>[b]</sup> of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler<sup>[c]</sup> of Abilene, **2** during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, **4** as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

**5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

**7** John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. **9** Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

**10** And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” **11** In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” **12** Even tax

collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?”<sup>13</sup> He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”<sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with<sup>[e]</sup> the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.”

### Zephaniah 3:14-20

<sup>14</sup> Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup> The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. <sup>16</sup> On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.

<sup>17</sup> The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you<sup>[a]</sup> in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing <sup>18</sup> as on a day of festival.<sup>[b]</sup> I will remove disaster from you,<sup>[c]</sup> so that you will not bear reproach for it. <sup>19</sup> I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. <sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.

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### Hymn - Joy to the World! The Lord is Come

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpgaWm2pnNs>

### Young at Heart

*Thy gentleness has made me great – Psalm 18:35*



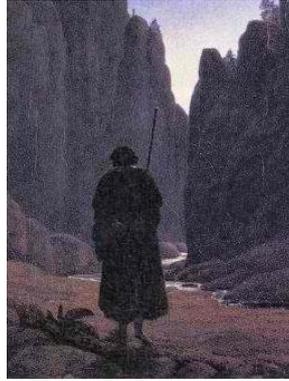
### Sermon - Strong words for action

*In the name of the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

John’s core message is, put your faith into action and live ethically. If you change your lives like this – you will draw close to God and align your life with God’s purposes. Otherwise, your life and identity as Abraham’s child, as God’s child, is like a stone, lifeless or a fruit tree that doesn’t bear fruit, fit to be cut down and burnt.

Thousands came out into the desert wilderness, seeking John and to listen to this message and find answers to their questions. They lived in a world where power ruled, where they were part of a system of oppression, violence, and greed, and they were powerless.

The peasants or crowds of people who came were subject to the emperor, the governor, and the chief priests. The tax collectors for the Romans ripped off their own people and they came. Soldiers, who violently assaulted and destroyed people's lives, also came seeking John.



John gave them a choice. Remain a viper and poison everyone around them or choose to live God's way and align their lives with God, not the emperor. This was radical. Prophets like John don't hold back. They speak God's message without fear. They bring change and transformation and God's rule on earth. John addressed the people and challenged their hardened hearts. Many of those who came were despised by their own people for they enforced the Romans' oppression. Yet somehow, they felt God was angry. Perhaps they knew it within their hearts and that's why they were out there in the desert, seeking John. They'd heard about what he was saying and wanted answers.

So, John gives them answers and a stark choice. Choose to continue living the way they did, and face being burned to a crisp by the fires that destroy, the fires of God's wrath or prepare their hearts and make their lives align with God's ways, so they are ready to welcome the coming Messiah, so they can receive the fire of the Holy Spirit which will transform them where they have life and God within their hearts.

It's a stark choice. To remain a viper serving a system that makes them like a lifeless rock or tree which bore no fruit. Or live.

It's a choice that involves repentance and embracing a new way of life. A choice that involves a baptism of cleansing in the Jordan and the washing away of their sins. A fresh new beginning. I wonder how this message would come across today. I wonder who and what makes our paths straight and prepares our hearts for the coming of Jesus. The answer is the gospel. It still speaks into our hearts. We still listen to John's words today; despite the fact we have a different context. John's wake-up call stirs our hearts and invites us to choose a different way of life where we share our resources with others, especially those who are disadvantaged. John's message inspires us to live ethically.

Now the people who sought out John wondered in their hearts whether he was the one, the coming Messiah. He said no. I'm not worthy to take off his shoes. This was the job of a servant, to take off his master's shoes and John is saying he is less than this servant. John told the people he baptised them with water, for the cleansing of sins. He said, "The Messiah, the one who comes after me, will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire." He promised them they would be transformed and filled with God's Spirit.

Today, our baptism involves repentance, a willingness to change our ways and align ourselves with God. Adults promise to change their ways and when they are baptised with water, they receive the Spirit and

are born anew. Those baptised as children have the choice of being confirmed later when we are ready to confirm their faith and declare belief in Jesus. I've prepared adults and baptised and confirmed them. If you haven't been baptised or confirmed and you want to be, come, and see me after the service or contact me, and I'll arrange a time to meet with you and we can organise it.

John prepared the way for Jesus to come and demonstrate the love and power of God. Today most of us are aware of God's way, after a lifetime listening to Jesus' teachings. Today John's message helps prepare our hearts for Christmas when we are reminded Jesus came amongst us and is still amongst us. John's message invites us to look at our lives and how we are living them and change whatever stands in the way of us living ethically and embracing God's ways. John invites us to live our faith by looking around us at those who are marginalised and disenfranchised amongst us. He raises our awareness of the need of others and inspires us to ask the question: *What then should we do?*

Many years ago, a man knocked on my front door. It was night-time, winter and raining. When I opened the door and turned on the light, I saw a man and a small boy. The man asked for a donation for the blind association. I was a young mother with two young children and my husband was at work. I was too afraid to invite the man and boy inside my home. I only had a dollar and was embarrassed when I gave it to him. But he accepted it with grace and thanked me and gave me a large diary. When he did, I realised he was blind, and the boy was leading him through the darkness. I've often thought of the man and the boy and regretted not asking them in for a hot drink or offering them one. They raised my awareness and changed my mindset. Because of them I have been giving to Fred Hollow's Foundation, for years now. The man was like John the Baptist. He said very little to me, but how he lived his life witnessed to me and changed me for the better.

Have you got a memory like this, of an encounter with a modern-day John the Baptist who has lived their life or witnessed to their faith where it's changed your mindset and helped you embrace a more ethical way of living, giving and sharing? If you have, you've been blessed.

### Quiet moment

#### Offering Prayer

Lord and giver of every good thing we bring to you our lives and gifts for your kingdom all for transformation through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Savior, amen

### Big O Celebration

#### Prayers of the People – John Gerrard

Loving God, you who know and care for us such that even the hairs of our head are numbered, we bring to you our prayers for others. The world's needs are great, Lord, and we need your love and care to be shown to many. Today we pray for the people of **Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.**

#### ***We give thanks for:***

those who have remained in these countries through years of conflict and oppression  
Christians who bear witness in the region even though they are small in number  
the many who have provided for humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding  
refugees from these countries who are enriching the societies in which they now have made their home.

#### ***We pray for:***

those who continue to bear physical and emotional scars from years of conflict  
victims of monsoons and other disasters in the region  
economic development to improve life for all people and the environment  
political stability amid competing powers.

In our **ecumenical** prayer cycle we remember today your people worshipping and serving at **St John's Anglican, Blackburn**. May they know and experience your love in a real way; in a way that compels them, as it does us, to show that love to others even though there may be a cost. Be with those who take special responsibility, as either ordained or lay people, that they may be both encouragers and supporters in that congregation.

Within our own **Presbytery** we pray today for **Ringwood** and **North Ringwood** congregations. May they know that you are with them as they work to show your way and your compassion to others in their communities. Be with those who take special responsibility in the organisation and outreach of these congregations, we pray, that they will feel your strengthening presence as they serve you. Guide them as they re-introduce gathered worship, while also applying the experience learned from ministering to the community through new channels during recent restrictive periods of lockdown.

We pray, too, for those working in Synod's program for equipping Leadership for Mission. We give thanks for the clarity of purpose which Synod has set out in their Vision and Mission Principles for the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. As we seek to put these guiding Principles into practice, strengthen and refresh our will, Lord, to show your love in our community.

We seek your blessing on our people, on our worship and our work together. We ask your blessing on each member of our cluster ministry team and their families as they lead us in worship, service and growth at the parishes within the cluster. May this be a time of encouragement and growth for us all. We pray today for comfort and healing for those close to us who are unwell or who need your guidance and strength, and we remember and pray for them now .....

We bring these prayers in our Saviour's name, praying the words that he taught us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

### **Candle Prayers**



### **Blessing**

We go in Peace in the love of God in the Power of the Spirit May the Lord Bless and Guard us

May the Lord make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us

As we bring Christ's love and peace to the world. Amen

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### **Dismissal**

In all things and at all times remember Christ is with you.

Make your life your worship to the praise and glory of God. Amen

### **Hymn - We shall go out with Joy** tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsxetUob-bs&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=24>

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## Pastoral Care tips – Rev Tina

From our Quiet morning – Corry Skilbeck and Rev Tina

YouTube - Breton Carol – Loreena McKennitt

<https://youtu.be/2GJld-t91cw>



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### Advent

Advent invites us to begin this journey  
 We hear God whispering: *Come home child*  
 With wonder we surrender into God's love.  
 We finally come to know we are enough for God.

### Words for the beginning

Poetry Prayers Rev Sarah Speed  
 Laying the Foundation (Peace) | Luke 1:57-80  
*A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org."*

If I could give you words for the very beginning— for the stretches and the yawns, and the opening of eyes, for the first hiccups, and the first smiles, and the first purse of your lips, I would say, "Oh, dear child, how you are loved." But the thing about love is you can't stop there, so I would go on to say, "You are strong, stronger than you think. And you are not alone—

look at these parents who adore you and these doctors and nurses fighting for you. And you are enough, already enough. You haven't done anything yet. You've just been here, breathing, sleeping, and already, you are enough. And then I might say, "This world is a mess, but it is your home, and you can make it better, so always try to make it better.

And maybe most important of all: there is a love that is bigger than my understanding, that moves through this world, and I call that love God. And that love is here, here in this room, and that love knows your name by heart." Those are the words I would say to you as you stretch and yawn and open your eyes on the very first morning of your very first day.

Let that be your foundation, like Zechariah did for John.

Let love be your beginning.

YouTube -Ode Single – Lachlan Skipworth 2018

<https://youtu.be/f6or2ZM4gAY>

## Advent Meditation – ©2021 Tina Lyndon

I invite you to make yourself comfortable  
 Rest your hands gently upon your lap place your feet firmly on the ground  
 Feel the chair against your back, begin noticing your breathing  
 The rising and falling of your abdomen

Notice the sounds around you, soft humming of cars, birds singing, distant voices,  
 notice them,  
 then allow them to pass through your mind,. imagining them drifting away  
 Breathing out slowly and deeply like a long sigh allowing your lungs to fill naturally

Breathing out slowly and deeply, allowing your lungs to fill naturally  
 saying to yourself "it's good to relax"  
 breathing out any tension, breathing in peace, inviting Jesus saying to yourself:  
 Come Lord Jesus Come be with us  
 Come and fill our hearts with your peace  
 We welcome you  
 We welcome your peace

*Silence for about 2-3 minutes*

Thank you, Jesus, for filling us with your peace  
 Help us carry it in our hearts through this time of Advent as we wait on you.

## Hauser – Piano Concerto No. 2 Rachmaninov

<https://youtu.be/fTdzXmvMaOA>

As we move ahead into the future –

### **Trust in the Slow Work of God**

*By Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955)*

Above all, trust in the slow work of God  
 We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay  
 We should like to skip the intermediate stages  
 We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.  
 And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability -  
 and that it may take a very long time. And so, I think it is with you  
 your ideas mature gradually – let them grow  
 let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on,  
 as though you could be today what time  
 (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)  
 will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.  
 Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling  
 yourself in suspense and incomplete.

## Acknowledgments

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