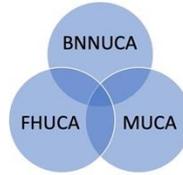




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

The Uniting Church in Australia
Congregations of: Blackburn
North / Nunawading; Forest Hill;
and Mountview (Mitcham);
in a shared ministry together



Sunday 19th December 2021 - The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Seeking sanctuary (Love) from Sanctified Art.

Close to Home – Creative Resources for Advent – Epiphany, Year C – A sanctified Art

Hymn TIS O Come O Come Emmanuel

(YouTube - O come, O come, Emmanuel - (Piano/Cello) - The Piano Guys 2012 (Written Materials)

<https://youtu.be/iO7ySn-Swwc>

Call to Worship

We are seeking—
deeper faith,
a place to belong,
the feeling that God is here

We are seeking—
joy that overflows,
the movement of the Spirit,
a hand to hold

We are seeking—
the freedom to be,
the courage to love

We are seeking, but here in this space,
God is here. We are found. Amen.

Candle Lighting Liturgy

A: God's love is like an open door.

B: God's love is the streetlight that guides us home.

A: God's love is a warm bed to fall into.

B: God's love is a table with room for you.

A: God's love is a crackling fireplace.

B: God's love is the sun that streams through the windows.

A: God's love is the roof over our heads and the floor beneath our feet.

B: God's love is a home for you and me, for neighbours and strangers, for family and friends, for enemies and partners.

A: God's love is a home for all.

B: Today we light the candle of love

A: May it burn brightly in this space and even brighter in our hearts. B: Amen.

Prayers of Adoration

God of love
You love us with an everlasting faithfulness
 Jesus our Lord
You teach us how to love
 Holy Spirit
You fill our hearts with love
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 You fill us with wonder You lead us forward
You make our hearts new
You give us courage to take risks
You provide light and life and truth
We give you our thanks and praise

Prayers of Invocation

Come Holy Spirit
Come and bless us today
Open our hearts to the Christmas Story
Help us grow in our faith and love
For you Lord and one another

Prayer of Confession

Lord we wish we were more like Mary, who in the face of great change, went and sought help. She did not wait for help to find her; she walked to the shelter she needed. Too often we wait silently for the world to change around us instead of speaking up for the things we need. Forgive us for failing to care for ourselves the way you would care for us. Give us the courage to be more like Mary. Lord we wish we were more like Elizabeth, who greeted Mary with laughter and contagious joy. How many people have crossed our doorstep and how many times have we failed to see them, and greet them with joy and laughter? Lord, give us the courage of Mary, and the grace of Elizabeth.

Words of Forgiveness

Lord, we are on a journey where step by step we grow in love for you and others. Even when we do not care for others or ourselves, the way you care for us, you still love us. There is nothing we can do to lose your love

INTERACTIVE NATIVITY STORY WITH CAROLS

NARRATOR- Luke 1:26-35

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He 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. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The 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.

Mary and the Angel Gabriel

CAROL - TIS 302 The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

NARRATOR- Luke 2:1-5

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Mary and Joseph and the Donkey

1. Little donkey, little donkey
On the dusty road
Got to keep on plodding onward
With your previous load

3. Ring out those bells tonight
Bethlehem, Bethlehem
Follow that star tonight
Bethlehem, Bethlehem

2. Been a long time little donkey
Through the winter's night
Don't give up now little donkey
Bethlehem's in sightInterlude

4. Little donkey, little donkey
Had a heavy day
Little donkey, carry Mary
Safely on her way

Source: Musixmatch Songwriters: Eric Boswell Little Donkey lyrics © Chappell Music Ltd

YouTube Little Donkey for written materials
Chet Valley Churches – Performed by Christmas Kids 2020
<https://youtu.be/vJaxa9kF7to>

Mary and Joseph go behind stable

CAROL - O Holy Night, V1

O Holy Night!
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

Fall on your knees
Oh hear the angel voices
Oh night divine
Oh night when Christ was born
Oh night divine
Oh night divine

(YouTube- Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo - O Holy Night / Canticque De Noel (Christmas-Vienna 1999) For Written Materials)

<https://youtu.be/V7uiqRCW6I8>

NARRATOR- Luke 2:6-7

⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Mary, Joseph come out with baby

CAROL - TIS 31 - Once in Royal David's city, v 1&2

NARRATOR- Luke 2: 8-17

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah,[Ⓜ] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,[Ⓜ] praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"[Ⓜ]

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child.

Angels and shepherds

CAROL - TIS 309 V 1 & 2 Angels from the realms of glory

NARRATOR- Matt 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men[Ⓜ] from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,[Ⓜ] and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah[Ⓜ] was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd[Ⓜ] my people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men[Ⓜ] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,[Ⓜ] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped,[Ⓜ] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. ©NRSV National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Wise people and camels

CAROL - TIS 311 V 1 &2 Silent night

All children around manger scene

CAROL - TIS 318 Away in a manger

Reflection

Christmas in the Kitchen – Rev Tina

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen



I wonder how Mary and Joseph coped with Christmas in the stable? Mary, a young girl far from home gives birth amongst the animals. Who helped her with the birth of Jesus? Did family travel with her or did the local midwife assist? Mary must have felt apprehensive after travelling through the desert on a donkey, when she was heavily pregnant. It was her first child. I wonder if Joseph helped her give birth. We don't hear much about it.

Bethlehem was booked out. There must have been thousands staying there and it is freezing at night in January and can snow. Did Mary and Joseph bring food for the journey? Or did they buy something warm to eat from the inn? We don't often consider the practical things about the birth of Jesus.

I wonder if you've seen a tagine before. Berber families travel throughout the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, or close to the Sahara Desert, usually on donkeys. They carry these tagines along with them and a small kerosene stove, a bit like we use for camping. They find a sheltered spot or firepit or set up beside a river and cook. I wonder if Mary and Joseph brought along a pot and set it up on a fire pit in the stable and cooked something hot to eat and warmed themselves by the fire.

All of us like to spend time in our kitchens. It's the heart of the home where family and friends like to gather to talk and eat. This time of year, many of us are making Christmas treats and feasts in the kitchen. Some of us may have lots of visitors and they usually head for the kitchen. But Mary and Joseph were far away from their families' kitchens. I wonder what they ate for their first Christmas. Perhaps flat bread with broad beans or lentils. I wonder what they offered their guests, the shepherds and wisemen, at a time when hospitality counted. Most of us offer hospitality to others or receive it from others at Christmas. Many of us have fond memories of Christmas lunches or dinners. We may travel to family or friends' places, or they may travel to us. I've memories of Christmas lunch at my grandparents, with my parents, four aunts and their partners and seventeen cousins, all gathered around two large tables in the dining

room, for a wonderful feast. I remember the pudding with sixpences in it. My family has changed over the years, from coming from mostly a Celtic and Jewish heritage to a league of nations with family from Singapore, Japan, Italy, Macedonia, and the Philippines. Families have become more multicultural and multifaith today. I'm sure that Bethlehem was multicultural, and the wise men may have come from different nations and cultures. I wonder how Mary who came from a small village felt about meeting people from all over the known world, who had to travel to Bethlehem because of the Roman Census.



This is an icon of Mary. I purchased it from the Anglican Benedictine Abby of St Mark at Camperdown many years ago. What I find reassuring is Mary has her hands open, as if to receive. I believe this symbolises her desire to receive whatever God brings into her life. Perhaps her openness helped her live through the changes that came into her life, where she was able to receive the greatest gift of all, and give birth to him, Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, where her life was never the same again.

I wonder what it could be like if we held our hands out like Mary, with trust and openness and willingness, to receive whatever God brings into our lives.

Would you like to try holding your hands out, where you imagine you are receiving the gift of Jesus into your hearts this Christmas, where you open your heart to how God wants to bless you?

I invite you to hold out your hands like in the icon, as we say this prayer:

Lord, your love is like an open door, a home for all.
 You lead us with love into the future, step by step,
 you teach us how to love, with courage and help us make a home for you and others in our hearts.
 Lord, your love is like an open door. Amen

This coming year may we all be blessed as we journey together with God and one another.

Quiet Moment



YouTube – Mary did you know – Clay Aiken 2015

<https://youtu.be/-Uki0dkthzl>

Offering Prayer

Elizabeth offers her home. She offers her arms. She offers her joy.

She offers her affirmation and confidence.

Elizabeth offers everything she has when Mary shows up at her door, and it just feels holy, doesn't it?

Part of our call as people of faith is to give when and where we can. So today we are invited to be a little more like Elizabeth. Today we are invited to give generously, trusting that God will take these gifts and build a better world.

We give these gifts to you O Lord with joyful hearts.

Prayers of the People – Geoffrey Willis

Dear Lord, in our prayers today we remember the complex political situation in **China, Hong Kong** and **Macau**. China has a long history developed over many centuries, but, in recent times, it has seen a hardening of government and a troubling thirst for power. We pray for wisdom and understanding as the island nations of Hong Kong and Macau are threatened by the ambitions of the mainland. Lord, we especially pray that other world powers are not drawn into arguments which lead to conflict. May diplomacy lead to peace and good relations. Dear Lord, we pray for the Christian Church in China. Please bless its growth and influence and may its members live out their faith as they bravely challenge injustices which may result in persecution. May the Church and its leaders and members provide examples which challenge the government's policies of economic growth and consumerism.

In our local ecumenical prayer cycle we pray today for the leaders and people of **St Alfred's Anglican Church in Blackburn North** and their senior minister Peter MacPherson. St Alfred's provides a lively contemporary worship style in the evangelical tradition. It is also in partnership with St Luke's Vermont. We pray for their staff of associate ministers, their children's and families' ministry and their youth program. We pray for their busy program of Christmas services for families and kids and for their open service on Christmas Day where full vaccination is not required. Dear Lord, please bless their members involved in mission, including their chaplain to the Mission to Seafarers.

In our Presbytery, we pray for the leaders and people of the **Rowville Uniting Church**. This church has many links with the Rowville community and operates the Bridgewater drop-in and counselling centre. May their outreach be blessed. Also in our Presbytery we pray for the work of **Uniting AgeWell** and its operation of various aged care communities in the suburbs of Melbourne. May those whom it serves receive love and care.

Closer to home, we pray Lord for our **Mountview** members and especially our families with young children. Please bless those who lead them in Sunday School. We pray too for our **Whitehorse Uniting Cluster** and our friends at Blackburn North-Nunawading and Forest Hill. May we discover new ways of working together and of encouraging each other in the faith. Let us join together as we say the prayer which Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Our father in heaven, hallowed by 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 (Rev Tina)

Sending out

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 God's house, all are welcomed—so come back soon.
 In the name of our Foundation—God, Spirit, and Son— go in peace.

Carol - TIS 317 Love came Down at Christmas

YouTube - Love Came Down at Christmas - John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers, City of London Sinfonia – 2018

<https://youtu.be/4l6x8lcclz8>

Pastoral Care Tips – Rev Tina

A Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for a year of challenges and blessings
 What a year it's been!! We've managed it!!
 We've journeyed through it as pilgrims on the way,
 we've remained faithful to you and one another.
 As we enter a time of celebration with our loved ones
 As we look forward to a Sabbath rest in January
 Help us let go of our anxieties and apprehensions about the future
 Help us embrace new adventures with you Lord,
 new possibilities and journeys to unexpected places.
 Help us abandon ourselves to you in prayer,
 where we trust and obey,
 and listen to you in our hearts.
 Help us hear the call of the Spirit,
 which takes us wherever the wind blows.
 Help us dance barefoot like children, with freedom and joy.
 Let us leave the shores of known places,
 for the wide-open sea with new horizons,
 new places and new hopes.
 Let us rejoice, with God and others,
 loved ones and strangers.
 As we celebrate the birth of Jesus amongst us,
 let us rest in January,
 Let us enter into God's Sabbath,
 allowing the cobwebs to clear.
 And if we're able to,
 Let us journey to forests, gardens and beaches,
 with families and friends,
 then return home with fresh new perspectives.
 Let us give thanks for the wonderful blessings
 we have received and hope to receive.

© 2021 T. Lyndon



Christmas by Leunig

Dear God, it is timely that we give thanks
 for the lives of all prophets, teachers,
 healers and revolutionaries, living and dead,
 acclaimed or obscure, who have rebelled,
 worked and suffered for the cause of love
 and joy.

We also celebrate that part of us, that part
 within ourselves, which has rebelled,
 worked, and suffered
 For the cause of love and joy.
 We give thanks and celebrate.

Amen.