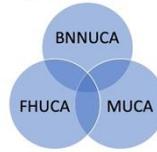




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



Sunday 2nd January 2022

Introit – Be Still for the Presence of the Lord tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-yBLNgQkvY&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLsLD2rC&index=5>

Be still, for the presence of the Lord the holy one is here;
come bow before Him now with reverence and fear:
in Him no sin is found - we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Call to Worship

We come to this place—
each of us on our own path.

The path is winding,
and the path is not always clear,
and the path changes,
but we are here.

You Lord are walking us home.

**What a gift it is
to not walk alone.**

Hymn 301 – The First Nowell – tMt video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T76_VUPHDpU&list=PL5dbbdzyKBaj3-6VCSVh-zqM5p5YE-V0w&index=26



Prayers of Adoration and Invocation

Lord Our God

All the nations have come into your light and glory
We have been given a glimpse of your mystery
The light shines into our lives
Because of you our hearts rejoice

Jesus our Lord
 God with us - Emmanuel
 You revealed the transforming love of God to the world
 it will never be the same
Because of you we have access to God

Holy Spirit
 Revealing the mystery and love of God
 Leading our hearts home to God
 Opening our mind to the truth of the gospel
 Giving us courage to live out our faith
Because of you God's love has been poured into our hearts

Prayer Invocation

Come Holy Spirit Show us the way
 Reveal God's will for us
 Lead us on the pathway to the future you have planned for your church
Amen

Prayer of Confession

**God of changed plans,
 The Magi heard in a dream that they were to take a new way home—a different path, an untravelled road. And to our amazement, they did just that. The Magi packed their bags and went home by another way. We wish that change could be easy for us, but more often than not, when whispers of change come, we tend to clench our fists and hold on tighter.
 Forgive us for resisting change that might be holy.
 Forgive us for ignoring that there is more than one road home. Forgive us for failing to hear your invitation.
 Guide our steps to unfamiliar places.
 Gratefully we pray, amen.**

Words of Forgiveness

No matter which roads we take in this one wild and precious life,
 God walks with us. God never leaves our side.
 When the road changes and we find ourselves on a new path home, God is always there.
 Hear and believe the good news:
**No matter where we go,
 no matter what we do,
 we are claimed, loved, and held by God.
 Thanks be to God for a love like that.**





Prayer for Illumination

Holy God,
 You speak to us in Scripture and in prayers,
 in sunrises and sunsets, in friends and in strangers,
 in dreams and in songs.
 You are speaking all the time,
 and how often do we miss it?
 Still our minds so that we can listen with a depth that we have not heard before.
 Still our hearts so that we can receive with open arms what it is you are offering us today.

Readings

Ephesians 3:1-12

3 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for^[a] Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery^[b] was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹and to make everyone see^[c] what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in^[d] God who created all things; ¹⁰so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.^[e] ©NRSV National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Matthew 2:1-12

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. ⁵They 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^[d] my people Israel.’” ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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.” ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

YouTube - Aruna: The Coventry Carol (arr. Michael McGlynn) 2016

<https://youtu.be/Wit-jGD4wCw>

Sermon

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

HANG ON A
MINUTE....



Leunig – Used with permission

Looks like this character is reading the newspaper or The Daily Gloom. We might be reacting in the same way to the latest news. Just when we thought things were getting back to normal and we were feeling a bit “over” all these “changes” we’ve had to adapt to. Only today I was having a conversation with a lady working at the local deli about how the world has gone crazy with this pandemic.

It’s been a bumpy road and it’s not over yet. But what a year it’s been! We’ve learnt so much. We’ve learnt what we value most – our loved one; we’ve reached out to the community to help those doing it tough; we been resilient and adapted to a lot of change and we’ve become more aware of the “fluff and stuff of life”, we can do without.

Today’s gospel tells the story of the Magi, Gentiles who travelled from the east to Bethlehem. Depending on the translation of the bible – they were Magi, Zoroastrian priests from Persia and astrologers or wise men who came from the East, which could have been from nations far away, from along the Silk Road that stretched from China to the Middle East.

At some stage the wise men were given names, Melchoir the King of Persia, Gasper the King of India and Bathasar the King of Arabia. Later, more names, Shem, Ham and Japheth, names symbolising the three races or nations of the known world. Royal gifts were given, gifts to Jesus who the wise men called the King of the Jews. These wise men understood astrology and may have been educated, regarded as scientists and mathematicians, and must have been wealthy to have been able to give such valuable gifts.

The wise men followed the star and believed in God communicating through dreams. They met with the Romans’ puppet governor, Herod, who along with Jerusalem was afraid. One can see the irony in Jesus being considered the King of the Jews by wise men at his birth and the Romans’ sign above his cross naming him as “King of the Jews” when Herod and others finally arranged to have Jesus crucified.

Herod was afraid of Jesus, and not long after Jesus’ birth, Herod ordered the deaths of many innocent infants and Jesus and his family were forced to flee from him, as refugees into Egypt. The wise men fled Herod too. They had no intention of revealing the location of Jesus, the long awaited one, the Messiah. The gospel tells us the wise men having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, left for their country by another road.

This meant returning home on an unknown road. They had no maps in those days. Travellers had to depend on reading the stars. They may not have known anyone along the way or where to find lodging or food, may have had to ride their camels through isolated deserts or over high mountains. It may have been risky going home by another road.

Perhaps we are being invited to travel along unknown roads, to find Jesus and give him gifts and then return home by another way. The long distance of our journey could be our lifespan over an average of eighty years. Our gifts that we offer to Jesus could be the gifts of the spirit we have received, and our God given talents. Perhaps we are wise men and women on a journey home to God and our journey is more about a journey to the heart of God and ourselves. It can take a lifetime of letting go to understand the mystery of God and finally come to that place where we began the journey and know it for the first time.

There are scary times along the way. Such as when we think the Uniting church is shrinking in numbers. What began as an ecumenical movement to unite has turned out differently from what was expected and that is the nature of life and the journey. We don't know God's will for his church.

Presently there are 2.38 billion Christians in the world, a third of the world's population and increasing where the greatest numbers are in island nations, Africa, South America, USA, and Asia. Many Christians are orthodox and catholic. By 2060 there will be 3 billion Christians and 3 billion Muslims. Australia's population is 25 million and roughly 60% are Christians, down from about 96% in 1911. We are a multicultural nation now with at least 3 million people of other faiths and in some suburbs 40% of people say they don't have a belief.

Perhaps a challenge people of faith face in Australia is consumerism. People are valued if they work, spend money, and consume, are financially well off and own stuff. God has a different viewpoint and values us for who we are not for our productivity and what we consume. I wonder how we can find common ground, a meeting of hearts. What are some of the conversations we need to have?

Many people are interested in their heritage and spend time on family trees and exploring DNA and finding out who their ancestors are and where their faith came from. Many of us are migrants, some 5th generation migrants have lost track with the spirituality and culture of their ancestors. It's long been recognised there's a disconnect between our religion and spirituality and it affects our ability to journey deeper. Many churches whose community are first- and second-generation migrants are still in touch with their cultural roots and spirituality, and they drive across town to belong to their community. However, over time, third generation migrants assimilate into society and may forget their roots, until they're older. I wonder if anyone would drive across town to belong to our congregations. If we are to move forward and journey on a different road, we need to have conversations about who we are, where we come from, what's our spirituality and culture and find common ground and celebrate and share it with one another.

We have a strong bond and sense of belonging and have grown up with the concept of our local church community and as we have aged the demographics of society and our culture have changed around us and there is a disconnect between our way of being church and society. There is not however, a disconnect in how we reach out to society through the Op shop, for example. We need to have conversations with those who come and be the bridge between outreach and church, where we build relationships.

Do you have memories of fireside conversations? At the end of a hard day of walking along the Larapinta trail the group I travelled with in July would sit around the fire at night and have conversations about where we come from, who is our family, and what matters to us. If we are to journey on a different road, we need to have conversations like this and find common ground.

Consider the grandmothers in Russia, a communist nation that suppressed Christianity and persecuted Christians and destroyed churches. 106,300 Russian clergy were executed between 1937-41. 12-20 million people were victims. But the 70-year campaign to eliminate religious faith failed because of the grandmothers, the “babushka”, who taught children to revere icons, sing hymns, and believe in God. The grandmothers didn’t have anything to lose, were past retirement and didn’t have to worry about losing their job. Today there are 67 million Christians in Russia and 35 million in the Ukraine.

Perhaps we are being invited, men and women, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, great grandmothers, and great-grandfathers, perhaps we can be “babushka” for the younger generations. I’m here because of my grandmother.

Perhaps we are being challenged to return home to God another way, different from the way we came. These are my reflections. Please share your reflections and invite conversations. Explore whether we need to journey home another way.

And it is enough for us to plant a seed in a heart, and we are enough, whether we build a church or offer a glass of water. God will say to all of us, well done good and faithful servant.

YouTube – O Come O Come Emmanuel – The Piano Guys (Piano/Cello) 2012

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

Something to ponder on:

YouTube Coventry Carol (Acapella) – Christmas Carol (Assyrian- Aramaic) 2015 from Assyrian Praise and Worship Christian Songs

<https://youtu.be/7ZzcweWFev4>

Call to Offering

The Magi came bearing gifts because that is what we do when we love someone. We prepare. We celebrate.

We drop off casseroles and flowers. We bring gifts. It has always been that way.

Today, we are invited to do the same for God. We are invited to bring our gifts as a sign of our love.

And instead of gold, we’ll give our offerings. Instead of frankincense, we’ll give our talents and our energy.

Instead of myrrh, we’ll give our time.

We give because we love.

Prayer of Dedication

God of new beginnings,

We offer these gifts to you today because we love you.

Take our gifts and use them for your good.

With hope we pray, amen.

Prayers of the People

God of The Way, we all have roads we travel. We travel emotional roads— the narratives we tell ourselves, the mental places we revisit again and again, the assumptions and the fears we know by heart. Then there are physical roads— the places in our lives that we walk every day, to shopping centres and cafes or family, friends, or neighbour’s homes. And then there are roads of our society— the paths carved out that we are expected to follow, dress and etiquette, education, and rules, so many things unspoken, but built in stone all the same.

Today we remember the Magi— who travelled, who knows how long, down a dusty road to get to you. Holy God, we too want to be people that travel mental, physical, and cultural roads to get to you. We want to gather in your sanctuary. We want to remember you in our prayers. We want our hearts to know the way home, the way back to you, by perfect memory. Help us get to that place, for we long to be journeying toward you.

Lord, as the Magi travelled to you, we remember the road they took home— a road home by another way. God we are walking. This life is a journey. Be in our steps, that we might be led to you. Be in our eyes, that we might see you. Be in our hearts that we might be brave enough to go home by another way.

Lord, we pray for those suffering under unjust leaders. For those being persecuted for their faith. For those marginalised without a voice. For those living in poverty. For those with COVID. For those who have lost their livelihoods because of the pandemic. We pray for our church, for all churches throughout the world, and in this moment of silence for our loved ones, our own needs. Amen.

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

Hymn 292 Infant Holy, Infant Lowly – tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sPI-Ne3DAI&list=PL5dbbdzyKBaj3-6VCSVh-zqMSP5YE-V0w&index=19>

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

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 779: May the Feet of God – tMt video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=40>

Pastoral Care Tips

Consider January a Sabbath rest, as much as possible. Be creative in your approach and find something that works for you. Practice the art of doing nothing. Let go of all the stresses and strains of the year and begin afresh. Stay away from large crowds and stay safe. Indulge in the simple things of life. Enjoy the company of your loved ones. Celebrate being alive.



Prayer

Dear God,
These circumstances will change.
This situation will pass. Amen



Leunig. (Used with permission)