

ORDER OF SERVICE: ST ANDREW'S

24 December 2023

Advent 4



Welcome, passing of the peace, and notices:

Acknowledgement of Country:

This land is God's land, and God's Spirit dwells here.

We acknowledge the Kurna people, traditional custodians of this land under God.

We acknowledge that their sovereignty has never been ceded and their connection with this place remains unbroken.

We commit ourselves again to working together for reconciliation in this land.

Lighting of candle and pouring of water:

We light the candle to remind us that the Light of God is always with us

We pour the water to remind us of our Baptism - we are refreshed and renewed by the Water of Life.

Introduction to service:

Thank you all so much for coming today and providing us with your suggestions - I hope this service is a special time of meaning for you as we think about our favourite bits of Christmas and what they mean to us.

We've looked at the readings for today and tried to weave the service around them and your chosen hymns. If you don't hear your favourite hymn: either you didn't tell me!! Or we're having it tomorrow. We'll have a few poems that I think provide beautiful imagery of this time, and our prayers for others will include your beautiful thoughts and messages for this time of year.

We'll also have a time of candle lighting where we think of those who are no longer with us, or of other losses and griefs in our life.

A poem: Born in you

With Gabriel's news the cosmic becomes personal.
Christ is coming—God is embodied— in a new way,
to transform the world,
and whatever that is, it is happening in you.
You are being asked to bear work that will have cosmic ripples.
What is that new act of Creation God is accomplishing in you?
What are signs of God's new creating in your own heart and life?
Look into your soul. Like gazing into a starry sky,
it will require time for your eyes to adjust,
time for the stars to come out.
Give time and stillness to watch, to wait, to observe.
What holy mystery is the Spirit doing in you?
Wait, and wonder... and say Yes.

Let us pray:

O Holy One, Newborn Love,
pour into my soul the mystery of this Christmas Eve:
the depth of the blackness, the faces of stars,
the moonlight sliding over the land.
Pour into my heart the pure song of angels,
the music of light that tingles above me.
Pour into my mind the longing of the forsaken,
the hope of the prophets, the confidence of children.

O Dawning One, Rising Love,
pour into me the faith of trees thriving in winter,
the hope of the red sun patiently climbing the horizon.
Pour into me the love of your coming,
the joy of your presence,
the delight that draws you so gently to us.

O Perfect Mystery, Unsayable Love,
pour into me the perfect wisdom
of a mother holding her child,
the heart of a father weeping for his child,
with wonder of a child seeing
pure blue moonlight for the very first time.

O Wondrous One, Unfolding Love,
pour into me this Christmas Eve
your mystery, your darkness, your delight.
Pour into my body your heart.
Pour into my being the life-giving gift of
Yourself.
May it be for me according to your grace.

Lighting of Advent Candles:

As we gather to worship God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
We remember the hope that is Christ Jesus.
The first 3 candles are lit

Jesus said, 'Anyone who does what my Father in heaven wants
is my brother or sister or mother.'

I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to his word.

The fourth candle is lit and this response is used:

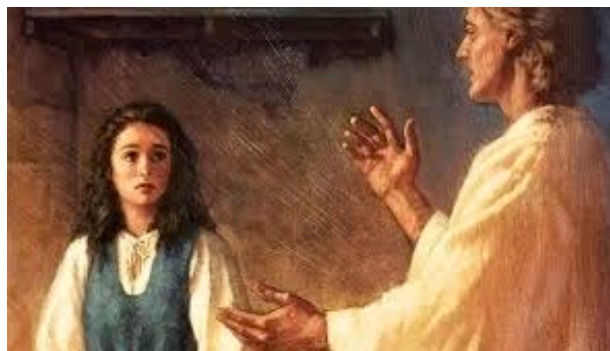
Jesus is the light of the world.

A light no darkness can ever put out.

We sing: Advent Candles

Advent candles tell their story
as we watch and pray,
longing for the Day of Glory,
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness changed for gladness,
on that Day.

Mary's gift, beyond all telling, was to give Christ room.
She gave God a human dwelling in a mother's womb.
Who could guess the final story?
Cross and glory;
empty tomb!



First Reading: Luke 1: 26 - 38: (Gabriel visits Mary)

We Sing: TIS 303: Hark the Herald Angels Sing

A poem: Christ born

If Christ is to be born
it will not be in a manger:
that was long ago.
Now it will be in you.
You yourself: be Christ;
bear love into this world.
Dare to believe
that what is holy
may be conceived in you;
that the eternal Word
may be made flesh
in your flesh.
All God intends
is that love be embodied,
and you, child—you
are called to bear this love
into the world.
With Mary, say Yes
to the divine in you.

We Sing: TIS 318: Away in a manger



Second Reading: Luke 1: 46b - 55 (Mary's Song of Praise)

We Sing: TIS 315: Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!

Poem: A meditation on the Magnificat

My soul magnifies you, O Lord...

Your praise is already alive deep within me.
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Saviour...

My heart reaches out to you, who reach out to me.
for you have looked with favour on the lowliness of your servant.

You see not my status but my belovedness.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

It is not arrogant but faithful to receive your blessing.
O Mighty One, you have done great things for me.

May I always be attentive to your grace.
Holy is your name.

May I keep you always at the centre of my life.
From generation to generation you have shown mercy
to those who are in awe of you.

I hold in my heart the loving things you have done for us.
You have shown strength with your arm.

You have already disarmed the powers.
You have scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

I am no better than a thief, no less than a saint.
You have brought down the powerful from their thrones.

The powers of this world are an illusion.
You have lifted up the lowly...

Those who appear lowly are full of your power and glory.
You have filled the hungry with good things...

You bless those whose blessings are unseen.
You have sent the rich away empty.

I am prepared to lose as well as to gain for your sake.
You have helped your servant Israel, in remembrance of your mercy...

Beloved, your grace changes everything.
according to the promise you made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants forever.

I will be a part of your new Creation, this world of justice and mercy.

We sing: TIS 276: There's a light upon the mountains



Prayers for others:

Poem: Healing:

We string up lights of joy at your coming.
We light candles for justice. We sing songs of hope.
But today I utter a prayer for healing.
I have been wounded. We all have been wounded,
in our bodies and in our hearts we have been broken
and we are not yet whole.
I am in need of mending, in need of forgiveness.
I am poor in spirit, weary of soul;
sometimes I don't have what it takes.
My open wound is your empty manger.
With a broken heart I welcome you.
Come, beloved healer, come.

We sing: TIS 317: Love came down at Christmas

Prayers for others:

Response:

After: 'Lord hear us'

The people say: **'Lord hear our prayer'**

Lord we thank you for each and every person gathered here today. We thank you for the gift of who they are, and what they each offer to our family at St Andrew's, be it money, time, or energy.

We bring their prayers for this season:

- Lord we pray for peace and goodwill everywhere...in our homes, our suburbs, our small towns, our cities. And we pray it not just for now, but for every day of the year. Please plant

in us, with the coming of your Son, a seed that will grow and blossom and bring your peace wherever and with whomever we find ourselves. ...Lord hear us

- Lord may the people in Gaza and Ukraine know your loving presence. Please be with them all. Be with the decision makers, and the aid bringers. We pray for a solution to come quickly... Lord hear us...
- Lord be with those struggling with severe weather events, including the flooding in FNQ, and the fires in NSW and Perth. Hold close those that have lost loved ones and property. Please bring them hope for the future. Lord hear us...
- Lord be with those who'll be alone, in hospitals or nursing homes or on the street, or just sitting on their couch with no-one to hug. May they somehow feel your touch. Lord hear us...
- Lord let us feel you in the Spirit of Christmas this year...wrapping your arms around the world in love, protecting and nurturing us. Gather us all in, no matter how we find ourselves at this time. We think of those who are struggling at this time of year, be it with the grief of a lost loved one, or the grief of other losses in life. I invite you to light a candle as a symbol of your prayers and thoughts at this time:

Poem: Emmanuel:

So often it seems we are so in the mood for Christmas,
but then something awful happens
and it changes everything.
But this is backwards.
Difficulties are constant: awful things happen—
and then Christmas comes along and changes everything.

This is the reason for the season.
“Because these days are dark,” the Beloved says,
“I come to be with you.
I see the pain, the loneliness, the despair.
I feel already the splinters of the manger, the nails.
And—therefore— I have come to be with you.”

Don't be afraid of the dark days, the broken days,
the hard days, the blank days.
This is where Christmas happens.

- And now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us...
Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and
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.

We sing: TIS 322: The North wind



Benediction:

May the coming of Christ
deepen your wonder
and widen your gratitude.

May the helpless child
bring forth your tenderness
and strengthen your love.

May the gentle mother
give you courage to embrace the holy
and find the divine in yourself.

May the child who shares our death
bring light into your darkness,
and hope to your weariness.

May the holy family in the stable
open your heart to the poor,

the homeless, the refugee.

May the child sought by soldiers
embolden you to cry out
and empower you to resist injustice.

May the angels who sing above you
awaken your heart
and surround you with beauty.

May the One Who Comes
remind you of your belovedness
and fill you with kindness and mercy,
and give you joy.

AMEN 

All poetry resources, the opening prayer, and the benediction are by Steve Garnass-Holmes, a retired United Methodist Pastor from Maine, USA, and used with permission. He and his wonderful work can be found at <https://unfoldinglight.net/>