

GATHERING

Acknowledgement of Country

In Advent, we wait and yearn for God's coming among us. On this land, we wait and yearn for justice. We acknowledge the (*name the traditional owners*) peoples whose land we gather upon. We honour their care for this Country. We honour their elders, past and present. As we wait in hope, we commit ourselves to work for a more just settlement for Indigenous peoples.

Introduction to Theme

Happy New Year! Welcome to the first day of the new liturgical year. We begin our advent journey of watching and waiting for God's presence among us. We look back in time, remembering God's presence with us in the past.

We look forward to the future, yearning for God's renewal of all things. And in hope, we learn to pay attention to the world around us, noticing the signs of God's coming.

Call to Worship – Advent 1 Candle Liturgy: Hope

O, that you would tear
open the heavens and
come down.

We wait for you, O God.

O, that you would make
known your justice among
all peoples.

We wait for you, O God.

O, that we would
see your wonders
in our midst.

We wait for you, O God.

We wait in hope.

We give thanks for your coming to us in times past.

We yearn for you to come again.

God has come among us. God is coming again.

Advent Candle (Hope):

As we light our first Advent Candle, we open ourselves up to Your Hope in our lives.

We light the Advent Candle and remind ourselves of the ways You have provided for us, and we live in the Hope that You will use us this Advent Season to bring Hope to those in need.

And so, as we wait, we light the candle of hope.

The first Advent candle is lit.

Sing:

Christ be our light Vs 1

https://youtu.be/qibAAo0JiEQ?si=ECAY_3cPyscUz4-T

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

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Opening Prayer

God of Hope,

we come to you watching and waiting for the signs of your presence among us. Open our eyes, open our hearts.

Draw us close to you.

Sing: ***O come, O come Emmanuel*** Together in Song 265

<https://youtu.be/iO7ySn-Swwc?si=Pv7paiOpla4qjabP>

<https://youtu.be/UH7asSGxAxA?si=FaaC4Ju4ilqyH9am>

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.**

Rejoice! rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

**O come, O come, great Lord of might
who to the tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.**

Rejoice! rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

**O come, O key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high
and close the path to misery.**

Rejoice! rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O branch of Jesse, free

your own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Rejoice! rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice! rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

PD; Anon., Latin, 18th cent. or earlier based on Antiphons from 9th cent.
or earlier tr. John Mason Neale 1818–66 alt.

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Prayer of Confession and Words of Grace

God, remember us
in this Advent time of watching and waiting.

Forgive us when we forget the stories of the past. Forgive us when we do
not notice you in our midst. Help us to bear hope for the future.

Restore us, O God, shine your face upon us,
that we might be made new. Amen.

Friends, as we watch and wait for God, the Spirit interrupts up with hope.

In Christ's name, you are forgiven and made new.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Passing the Peace of Christ

A reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 64:1-9

64 O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— 2 as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! 3 When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. 4 From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. 5 You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. 6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one who calls on your name or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. 8 Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. 9 Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might and come to save us!

3 Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

4 O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.

6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

17 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.

18 Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Sing: (Choir)

Star Child

https://youtu.be/wuxie6Cn4Po?si=qrnoDp-eHp5B_tqi

Star-Child, earth-Child, go-between of God,

love Child, Christ Child, heaven's lightning rod,

This year, this year, let the day arrive

when Christmas comes for everyone,

everyone alive!

Street child, beat child, no place left to go,

hurt child, used child, no one wants to know,

This year, this year, let the day arrive

when Christmas comes for everyone,

everyone alive!

Grown child, old child, memory full of years,

sad child, lost child, story told in tears,

This year, this year, let the day arrive

when Christmas comes for everyone,

everyone alive!

Spared child, spoiled child, having, wanting more,

wise child, faith child, knowing joy in store,

This year, this year, let the day arrive

when Christmas comes for everyone,

everyone alive!

Hope-for-peace Child, God's stupendous sign,

down-to-earth Child, Star of stars that shine,

This year, this year, let the day arrive

when Christmas comes for everyone,

everyone alive!

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Readings from the Christian Scriptures

Mark 13: 24–37

24“But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

25and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and

glory. 27Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four

winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and

puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29So also, when you see

these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30Truly I

tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken

place. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor

the Son, but only the Father. 33Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when

the time will come. 34It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home

and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the

doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35Therefore, keep awake—for you do not

know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight,

or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36or else he may find you asleep when he comes

suddenly. 37And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Offering

We give you thanks for time, money, resources, and talents. May we use these to bear hope in the world.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Reflection

Watch Out, Stay Alert: Waiting with Hope

Can you believe it is that time of year again? It seems like only yesterday you and I were celebrating our Advent season together last year. And here we are again! Summer starts, Christmas music is on and Christmas lights are popping up everywhere, Christmas trees are going up, the celebration has begun. Today is the first Sunday in Advent, the start of the church year, the day when we begin the preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. We sing the Advent hymns, and we wait, and we prepare.

How often do we remind ourselves that, for God's people, Advent is a season of waiting, longing and preparation and then realise how hard it can be to hang on to that spiritual meaning of the season? All around us are the trappings of Christmas and different sorts of waiting, longing and preparation. It'll be noisy and busy and stressful out there today and it will go on like that until after the New Year. The only day that will be commercially quiet will be Christmas Day itself, the day at the heart of all this activity and busy-ness. But even Christmas Day will have its own activities, busy-ness and stress so that even then true messages of Advent and Christmas may be drowned out. So, let's focus on those messages today.

"Wake up and stay awake. Keep alert, always on the look-out.

Get ready for you don't know when it's going to happen"

What is going to happen? Do we actually know in our hearts and souls what or who it is we are waiting for; longing for; preparing for? We're waiting to celebrate the night Mary gives birth to her son, Jesus, who will be Christ the King. And it is for Christ the King's return that we are to wait and prepare ourselves for at all times.

Waiting and waiting. How long? It is hard for us to understand Jesus' delay in his coming. God's time clock is certainly out of sync with ours as Little Jimmy learned one day as he was laying on a hill in the middle of a meadow on a warm spring day. Puffy

white clouds rolled by and he pondered their shape. Soon, he began to think about God. "God? Are you really there?" Jimmy said out loud. To his astonishment a voice came from the clouds. "Yes, Jimmy? What can I do for you?" Seizing the opportunity, Jimmy asked, "God? What is a million years like to you?" Knowing that Jimmy could not understand the concept of infinity, God responded in a manner to which Jimmy could relate. "A million years to me, Jimmy, is like a minute." "Oh," said Jimmy. "Well, then, what's a million dollars like to you?" "A million dollars to me, Jimmy, is like a penny." "Wow!" remarked Jimmy, getting an idea. "You're so generous... can I have one of your pennies?" God replied, "Sure thing, Jimmy! Just a minute." Little Jimmy wasn't ready for that response, was he?

Our text this morning seems an unlikely scripture for Advent. It has nothing to do with Mary and Joseph, the Wise Men, or shepherds watching their flock. Instead, it is a story about a wealthy landowner going on a trip. It is a story about being prepared, getting ready. It is a time to get ready—not for Christmas, but the Christ—the One who was, who is, and who is to come has arrived, is here and is yet to return. This morning we will think about Hope. Something I think we and our world need right now is Hope. Advent is a season of Hope. It reminds us not only of the birth of Christ and the hope we find in that event. But it also reminds us that we live between times, between the beginning and the end, between the first coming and the second coming. That's what our passage for today deals with.

Today, the theme of the first Sunday of Advent this year is Hope. My question is, "How do we find Hope and keep that Hope alive in the midst of not only the uncertainty of when Christ will return. But in the uncertainties of life itself?" We all have experienced the uncertainties of life, right? We all have been there. We have all stood on the edge of despair. We have all felt the total uncertainty of life. We've all felt at the end of our rope. One of the very first things we always ask for in the midst of uncertainty, disaster or trouble is: "Lord, show us the way, show us a sign." Have you watched the movie "Bruce Almighty"? starring Jim Carrey, there's a scene where Bruce's life has fallen apart. He has gotten fired, beat up when he tried to help a homeless man holding a sign, and he has had a fight with his girlfriend whose name just happens to be Grace. He is driving along feeling sorry for himself, talking to and yelling at God. "OK, God. You want me to talk to you? Then talk back. Tell me what's going on. What should I do? Give me a signal." Just then he passes a lighted traffic message sign which is blinking the words: "Caution Ahead." He ignores it and

continues his shout. "I need your guidance Lord, please. Send me a sign." About that time truck full of traffic signs pulls out in front of him. Very visible are the signs: "Dead End, Stop, Wrong Way, Yield, No Crossing and Do Not Enter." But Bruce ignores them, he doesn't see what he is asking for, complains about the truck and whips around it only to eventually run into a light pole. He gets out and yells at God. At the end of the scene, he shouts: "Answer me." And just then his beeper goes off with a telephone number. Bruce says: "Sorry, don't know you. Wouldn't call you if I did"

I think Jim Carrey nailed how we feel in the middle of a crisis, in the middle of despair. And he also captured exactly what happens. We ask for a sign and we're so blinded by what's going on in our lives that we can't see the signs for the fog of our emotions. That's part of what Jesus was telling his disciples. He says the signs are there. The signs have always been there. We just have to look. We have to get ready and stay ready so we'll know them when we see them. So, where do we look? How do we see the signs? I personally think it's really quite simple. And the hardest part of all is doing the simple things. The simple things are these: "Love God." "Love your neighbour." Pray and worship, give yourself, read the instruction manual, the Bible. Help others. It can't get much simpler than that. When we do all of those things, when we practice our faith and put it into action every day, then we'll be able to not only see the signs but read them as well. And we'll stay ready.

I said earlier that Advent is the season of Hope. And Advent Hope is like someone baking Christmas cookies who decides to add a bit of food colouring to the dough. We pour a few drops of red or green food colouring into the dough, and pretty soon all the dough is coloured. It doesn't take much, just a few drops but pretty soon all the dough has changed colour. It's the same with Hope. It doesn't take much, just a touch. It can be that one moment in prayer, a song or a hymn in worship, a verse or passage of Scripture. It can come from an act as simple as the baptism of a baby or someone proposing marriage. It can be seen and heard and felt in a hundred different ways during all the seasons of the church and the Christian year. But it's especially present during Advent and Christmas. There is a universal need for Hope. Hope in the midst of the ordinary everyday lives we live. Hope that can spring up in the midst of turmoil and even uncertainty. Hope that can lead us out of the fog of our selfishness and lead us into a state of readiness for anything the world or life throws our way. William Barclay, a Scottish theologian said, "The Christian hope is the hope which has seen everything and endured everything, and has still not despaired, because it believes in

God. The Christian hope is not hope in the human spirit, in human goodness, in human endurance, in human achievement; the Christian hope is hope in the power of God."

Friends in Christ! As the dawn of Advent breaks once again this day, and as we turn our hearts toward the coming of Jesus, may we pause, take a deep breath, and aim at heaven. When we aim at heaven, life here takes on an entirely different meaning. We begin to see ourselves as servants of God, preparing for his return. We begin to understand we are not alone, and find Hope that lives within each of us so we can face those uncertainties with faith. By God's grace, may this Advent open our eyes to the wonderful hope and joy for us in the coming of Jesus. Amen.

Commissioning of Elders and Church Councillors

Commissioning service of Elders/Church Councillors

1 SENTENCES

There are diverse gifts;

but it is the same Spirit who gives them.

There are different ways of serving God:

but it is the same Lord who is served.

God works through people in different ways:

but it is the same God

whose purpose is achieved through them all.

Each one of us is given a gift by the Spirit:

and there is no gift without its corresponding service.

There is one ministry of Christ:

and in this ministry we all share.

Together we are the body of Christ:

and individually members of it.

2 PRESENTATION

The minister addresses the people:

The Uniting Church provides for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them for the building up of the Church.

Having sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
we are now to commission as elders / church councillors
those whom we have elected to this ministry.

I present the following persons to be commissioned
or recommissioned as elders / church councillors:

Elders: Dinah Roepers, John Baglin.

Church Councillor: Robert McAlpine.

**The minister reads the names of the candidates.
The candidates stand together facing the congregation
and the Minister addresses them:**

Brothers and sisters,
the congregation has elected you to serve
as elders / church councillors.
The church council shall give priority in its life
to building up the congregation in faith and love,
sustaining members in hope, and leading the congregation
to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

**If there are elders to be commissioned/recommissioned,
the following statement shall be included:**

The ministry of elder is one of spiritual oversight,
and may also be exercised in pastoral visitation,
teaching, encouraging members of the congregation to share in mission,
and assisting the minister in leadership of worship and administration of the
sacraments.

**Where the elders are to be members of the church council,
the following should be included:**

Elders who serve on the church council
have a particular responsibility to ensure
that such matters have priority in the work of the church council.

3 THE VOWS

The minister asks the candidates:

Do you confess anew Jesus Christ as Lord?

I do.

Do you believe that you are called by God through the Church to this ministry?

I do.

Being guided by the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia, will you live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church?

With God's help I will.

Relying on God's grace, do you promise to carry out the duties of your office?

I do.

The people stand. The minister says:

Will you, the members of this congregation,
accept these brothers and sisters as church councillors?

We will.

Will you encourage them in love and support them in their ministry,
serving with them the one Lord Jesus Christ?

We will.

May God give you strength to fulfil these vows,
and to him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus
from generation to generation for ever.

Amen.

The people sit.

4 ACT OF COMMISSIONING

The minister says:

Beloved in Christ,
let us pray in silence for these people
before we commission them for the work
to which we believe the Holy Spirit has called them.

After a time of silence, the minister says:

Almighty God,
we thank you that in every age you have chosen leaders
to serve and care for your people.
We thank you that you have called these brothers and sisters,
our new elected elders / church councillors to serve you.

May those you have chosen
have the same mind which was in Christ Jesus
and be faithful disciples,
giving example to Christ's flock
and witnessing to the truth of the gospel;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

**The minister lays hands on the head of each candidate
in turn, and the minister says:**

God of grace,
through the Holy Spirit
empower your servants
Dinah Roepers, John Baglin, Robert McAlpine
for the ministry of elders / church councillors.

The people respond:

Amen.

5 DECLARATION

The minister says:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
I declare you to be elders / church councillors
of the Uniting Church in Australia
in the Kogarah Congregation.

The people may applaud.

Announcements

Christmas Bowl

Slide 1 Advent 1

Slide 2

In 2021, Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, leaving thousands of families devastated and forced to flee their homeland.

Jehan*, a brave mother of five, made the courageous choice to escape on foot to Pakistan after her husband was killed. Our local partner, Community World Service Asia, was there to provide lifesaving humanitarian aid for countless families like Jehan's.

Slide 3

Our partner CWSA supported families in an Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar following the takeover of the Taliban. They were able to provide cash assistance for

immediate food security and other essentials.

Slide 4 – Thank you!

Your gifts through the Christmas Bowl will help local partners, like CWSA, respond immediately to emergencies like we have seen in Afghanistan, giving families safety in exile – and hope for the future – when they need it most.

Slide 5 How to give

Prayers for Others

Let us bring our prayers to God, who is present and surprises us.

God whom we find in unexpected places, open our eyes to see you at work.

We pray for a world in crisis:

We pray for the whole creation,

groaning and suffering under climate change and overconsumption of human creatures.

We pray for justice for Earth,
for systemic changes that replace abuse with care.

Christ come among us,
renew your world.

We pray for places of violence,
the places that are easy to spot where war goes on, and the places where violence is more hidden, sitting under the surface.

We pray for justice for the victims of violence, we pray for changes in the actions of the violent.

Christ come among us,
renew your world.

We pray for a world where freedoms are not shared,

where some have too much, and others go without. We pray for justice and equity,
that all might flourish and live.

Christ come among us,
renew your world.

God of Hope,
in this Advent season of watching and waiting,

we give thanks for your coming to us in times past. We yearn for the renewal of all things.

Christ come among us,
renew your world. Amen.

Sing: Lord of all hopefulness (TiS 613)

<https://youtu.be/LCBjxVP6GWE?si=Rg0kDDyte7e68X2y>

**Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.**

**Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.**

**Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.**

**Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.**

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Blessing/Benediction

Keep watch! Stay awake!

Look for the signs of Christ's presence in the world. Go with the blessing of God,

accompanied by the Spirit,

to bear witness to the hope found in Christ.

Sending Out:

Leader:

Go from this place filled with the Hope

of what God is doing in our world.

Go now, as people of God.

All:

We go assured that God is love,

and God is our Hope.

We go to love our neighbour

as ourselves.

Leader:

Go now, held in the loving hands

of God Most High

Go now, to follow Christ in all things

Go now, in the love and fellowship

of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Sing: *Like a candle* Craig Mitchell (Deeper Water 144)

**Like a candle burning wildly
Raging soft against the night
Spark that leaps to clear the shadows
Sending warm, disturbing light
We are called to live the passion
Hope stands strong against all pain
for it's only in the burning
that the candle shows its flame**

**Like a river running freely
Rapids swirl beside our feet
Swiftly flowing from the high land
Comes to rest, still waters meet
All our journeys rising, falling
Taking turns we least expect
When the Spirit churns within us
Know God's power through the test**

**Like an angel walking lightly
On this fragile earth of clay
Touching folk with raw compassion
Laughing, playing on the way
Freely living every moment
In the mystery of grace**

Giving, dying, living, rising

See the beauty of God's face

See the hope that burns in darkness

Show compassion, strong and kind

Bind the hurt and broken-hearted

Be God's hands and voice and eyes

Sing a new song every sunrise

Climb to places out of reach

Walk in freedom of God's Spirit

As we die, so we shall live

We are called to live the passion

Hope stands strong against all pain

for it's only in the burning

that the candle shows its flame