

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

December 10, 2023

Advent 2

The Gathering of the People of God

WELCOME & GREETING

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

And also with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

We acknowledge that this land is God's land, and God's Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging of the Bidjegal and Gweagal people of the Eora nation, who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. This land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

KUC VISION STATEMENTS

Let us say together who we are.

***We are a congregation
who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles,
who create a safe place for the community
and who share the journey of life and faith.***

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here / ***God is always here***

God is with us / ***God is always with us***

CALL TO WORSHIP – Advent 2 Candle Liturgy: Peace

God says: comfort my people.

Speak words of peace.

Prepare the way for God.

Speak words of peace.

Every valley shall be lifted,

Every mountain made low.

Rough roads will be smoothed out.

God will make a way.

God says: speak tenderly to my people.

We will speak to the world words of peace.

God has come among us, speaking peace. God is coming again.

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

The second candle is lit.

HYMN: Christ Be Our Light (Verses 1 & 2) All Together 313

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.

(Refrain)

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

(Refrain)

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OPENING PRAYER & PRAYER OF CONFESSION

In our gatherings and in our lives,
show us your way, O God, prepare a path for us,
encounter us with the Good News of your presence.

Now in silence, let us take time to remember to God
the times when we have caused others to grieve.

Silence is kept.

Let us take time in silence to remember to God

the times when we have been grieved.

Silence is kept.

Let us take time in silence to remember to God the grief of the earth.

Silence is kept.

The psalmist says:

Will you not revive us again,
so that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your steadfast love, O God,
and grant us your salvation. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS (based on Isaiah 40:1-2)

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Your sins are pardoned. The penalty is paid.

Thanks be to God.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

HYMN: The Advent of our God TIS 271

The advent of our God
with eager prayers we greet,
and singing hasten on his road
his coming reign to meet.

The everlasting Son
was born to make us free;
and he a servant's form put on
to gain our liberty.

Let Zion now arise
to greet her infant king,
and gladly take with thankful heart
the peace he comes to bring.

As judge, on clouds of light,
he soon will come again,
his scattered people to unite,

with them in heaven to reign.

Then evil flee away
before the rising dawn!
Let our old nature day by day
God's image still put on.

Praise to the incarnate Son
who comes to set us free,
with Father, Spirit, ever one
to all eternity.

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 40:1–11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers; the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers; the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep.

Mark 1:1–8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,'" so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And the whole Judean region and

all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

REFLECTION

Our readings from Isaiah and Mark's gospel this morning speak about the coming of Christ. During this Advent season, we learn about the three ways that Jesus comes into our lives, Jesus, the baby born in the manger, Jesus who is coming in the second coming, and Jesus who is in the present, in our lives. This Jesus brings his grace and forgiveness into our lives. This is the Jesus that I want to talk about this morning. The one who brings forgiveness as we repent.

John the Baptist is totally inappropriate for the way we celebrate Christmas. Christmas is about the birth of Jesus as Matthew and Luke report that holy night many years ago. Mary, Joseph, angels, manger, shepherds, wise men; a child is born unto us. Glory to God in the highest! That is what Christmas is all about. Jesus is the reason for the season. Instead of Bethlehem and choirs of angels, Mark begins the story of Jesus' coming with a prophet calling and baptizing in the wilderness of Judea. In so doing, he adds a new figure to the good news about the incarnation and coming of the Christ. It is John the Baptist. Throughout the centuries the church has recognized Mark's unique contribution through its observance of Advent in preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

Advent means "Coming." Two thousand years ago, in a place called Bethlehem, lying in a manger, God came to us in the weakness of a baby. God entered our world, put on our shoes, and lived, breathed, and walked among us. He taught, loved, died on a cross, and rose again. God came to us, this is Advent. God does not come only "once upon a time," and then the story is over, "Happily ever after." It is not something the Lord did "One and done." Nor is the coming of God a once, and then only again at the end of time, reality. God continually comes to us. Every moment of every day, whether we realize it or not, whether we sense it or not, whether we can see or hear or touch him or not, God comes to us. Few weeks ago, I went to one of the beaches in Wollongong with Elin. It was a very hot day and there were so many people enjoying their time with their families and friends. We had an iced latte and sat down on the sand and enjoyed watching people swim at the beach and bodysurfing in the waves. The waves came and came and came again, without stopping. Just like the waves, you know God continually comes to us. The presence of God showers our lives, sweeping over us like waves in the ocean.

Now, you see John the Baptist is all about one coming. He is the forerunner, the one who comes before another to prepare the way. So when we celebrate not just a birth long ago, with all the nice, beautiful things we associate with Christmas, but celebrate Christmas as the coming of the Christ to us, John the Baptist becomes an appropriate figure for that celebration. Thus Mark starts not with Zechariah and Elizabeth or Mary and Joseph, but with John the Baptist. Mark declares to us, do you want to understand the good news? Do you want to know what God is doing? Well, it starts right here with John the Baptist. Mark says about this John in verse 4: "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John came to prepare the way for Jesus, to call the people to repentance. He came to proclaim that the Saviour of the world was coming and we should prepare.

I read a story about a Nigerian woman who was a doctor at a hospital in the United States. One day she was asked to lecture a class. On the day of her lecture, she introduced herself using an American name. 'What's your African name?' someone asked. She immediately gave it to him, several syllables long with a musical sound to it. 'What does the name mean?' he wondered. She answered, 'It means "Child who takes the anger away."' When he asked as to why she would have been given this name, she said, 'My parents had been forbidden by their parents to marry. But they loved each other so much that they disobeyed the family opinions and married anyway. For several years they were excluded, disliked from both their families. Then my mother became pregnant with me. And when the grandparents held me in their arms for the first time, the walls of anger, hostility came down. I became the one who swept the anger away. And that's the name my mother and father gave me.'"

After I read this story, it occurred to me that her name would be a suitable one for Jesus. Jesus is coming into our lives now to remove the anger, the frustration we feel with life. Jesus is coming, he is here now to take about our guilt, to forgive us, as we repent, as we turn away from our sins. This concept of repentance only occurs in this chapter and verse in the whole of Mark's gospel. Mark wants to make the point that repentance is very important. It marks the stage for the coming of Jesus in our lives. In repentance; we are turning back to the ideal, the way God created us to be. Our repentance is accepting and acknowledging that we are sinners, who need the forgiveness of almighty God. In our act of repentance, we are turning to God, asking him in a sense to recreate a new person, one who is more like what God intended us to be in the first place. In the act of repentance we are taking the I, that personal pronoun out of the picture, and replacing it with a three-letter word, G O D, God. In our act of repentance, we are declaring that we are no longer relying on ourselves, but we are surrendering to God, so that he may, through the waters of our baptism, recreate a new me, a me who is closer to the image that God created me to be at the beginning of time.

There is an old parable that illustrates very well what I am trying to say. There was a motherless young tiger who was adopted by goats and brought up to speak their language, follow their ways, eat their food. In fact, the little young tiger believed he was a goat. However, there came a day when a king tiger happened along and all the goats fled in terror. But the little tiger stayed behind, afraid and yet somehow unafraid. The little tiger cried a bit and then nervously nibbled at the grass. The king tiger laughed and asked the small tiger what he meant by this strange act. He said nothing, only bleating once again. So the king took him to a pool of still water and forced him to look at the 2 reflections side by side. But the little one failed to see any significance to it. When this failed, the king tiger hunted down a young deer and brought some of the raw meat to the young tiger. At first the little tiger recoiled from the strange taste. But he kept licking and soon sunk his teeth deep into the raw flesh. A roar began to swell deep in his throat. He looked over at the king tiger and he began to realize he was indeed a tiger." Repentance for us is the same thing. When we repent and turn, or make that U-turn back to what God intended for us to be then, we are tigers. In sin, we are less than God intended for us to be. In Christ, in our U-turn, we are becoming more and more like God intended us to be at the beginning of time.

This morning, John the Baptist calls us into the wilderness to hear a message. It is a message of repentance. John's message was a simple one, "Turn away from your sins and be baptized, and God will forgive your sins." The Messiah was coming and would soon arrive. There wasn't much time left. The people had to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Repentance is not typically what we think of when we think of Christmas. We love to talk about hope and love and joy and peace. We tend to focus on exalted concepts that make us feel good. Yet John the Baptist invites us into the wilderness to consider a message of repentance. It is a message at the heart of what it means to receive the coming Christ, who has come, and is coming, and will come again. It is a message central to how we move from hopelessness to hope. There can be no good news about Jesus Christ for us apart from the message of repentance.

Brothers and sisters in Christ! John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The season of Advent calls us to "turn around," to look at where our lives have been focused and to adjust that focus until it moves into harmony with God's loving purposes for all creation. This is how we prepare for Christ's coming. This is how we find that deep and lasting peace for our own lives and for our world. Amen.

HYMN Comfort, comfort all my people TIS 647

(Refrain)

*Comfort, comfort all my people
with the comfort of my Word.*

*Speak it tender to my people:
all your sins are taken away.*

Though your tears be rivers running,
though your tears be an ocean full,
though you cry with the hurt of living:
comfort, comfort.

Every valley shall be lifted,
every mountain shall be low,
every rough place will be smoother:
comfort, comfort.
(Refrain)

Though your eyes see only darkness,
though your eyes can see no light,
though your eyes see pain and sorrow:
comfort, comfort.

Every night will have its morning,
every pain will have an end,
every burden will be lightened:
comfort, comfort.
(Refrain)

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CHRISTMAS BOWL

Second Sunday of Advent: Peace
BRINGING PEACE TO REFUGEES IN ETHIOPIA

Sara fled to Ethiopia from Yemen eight years ago with her four children. In Addis Ababa refugees are at risk of severe exploitation, with little access to education, medical care or basics like food. Through Act for Peace's partner, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC), you can help provide refugees with medical and psychosocial care, as well as livelihoods training, giving people like Sara the chance to build secure futures for their families.

OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Loving and Gracious God,

We pray for our offering.

Guide us as we use these gifts to create a community of welcome and inclusion.

Be with us as we seek to love our neighbours as ourselves.

We pray for the work of Act for Peace and their partners in Ethiopia.

May we be a community known for our love.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

O God, your love for your children is without end,

and you teach us to love you in return:

hear the prayers we bring for all your people.

We pray for the peoples of the world,

for our neighbours whose lives are made miserable by poverty,
homelessness, oppression or war.

Help us to struggle for justice and peace with wise minds,
courageous hearts and souls that thirst for righteousness.

We pray for all in trouble or distress, for our neighbours
whose lives are filled with grief or despair, loneliness, sickness or pain.

We pray for those who are suffering from serious illness
and for families who are caring for them.

We especially name some of them in this prayer,

Brian and Rhonda, Prema and Priya, Jim and Bobbie,

Denis and Dolly, Jim Bird, Naghuia,

and others whom we name in our hearts.

Give them your healing and comfort.

Help us to reach out to those who need us with understanding minds,
generous hearts and souls that thirst for compassion.

We pray for our congregation to be a place where prayers are made,
where love abounds, where your name is honoured.

Please bless all the members and attendants.

Especially, bless all the children with us.

Help us open our hearts to the commandments to love,
even when loving is difficult.

Give us the courage to be people

who will commit their whole lives to respond your calling.

We give thanks for your listening for the sake of our saviour Jesus Christ. 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 in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.*

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

INVITATION

Come to this table:
you who have much faith,
and you who would like to have more;
you who have been to this sacrament often,
and you who have not been for a long time;
you who have tried to follow Jesus,
and you who have failed.
Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

COMMUNION HYMN: Be known to us in breaking bread TIS 514

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Saviour, abide with us, and spread
your table in our heart.

There share with us in love divine;
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

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Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also be with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

With joy we praise you, gracious God,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
whose coming opened to us the way of salvation
and whose triumphant return we eagerly await.
Therefore we join our voices
with all the saints and angels and the whole creation
to proclaim the glory of your name.

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.***

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

You are holy, O God of majesty,
and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
You sent him into this world
to satisfy the longings of your people for a Savior,
to bring freedom to the captives of sin,
and to establish justice for the oppressed.

He came among us as one of us,
taking the lot of the poor,
sharing human suffering.
We rejoice that in his death and rising again,
you set before us the sure promise of new life,
the certain hope of a heavenly home
where we will sit at table with Christ, our host.

We remember, on the night of his betrayal,
that Jesus took bread,

giving thanks, and broke it and gave it
to his disciples, saying:

Take, eat.
This is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after supper,
he also took the cup and said:
Drink from this all of you.
This is my blood shed for you
and for the whole world
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in remembrance of me.”
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Strengthen us, O God, in the power of your Spirit
to bring good news to the poor
and lift blind eyes to sight,
to loose the chains that bind
and claim your blessing for all people.

Keep us faithful in your service
until Christ comes in final victory
and we shall feast with all your saints
in the joy of your eternal realm.
Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour are yours, almighty God,
now and forever. **Amen.**

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God,
Have mercy on us.
Jesus, bearer of our sins,
Have mercy on us.
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
Grant us peace.

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of glory,
you nourish us with the bread of life
and the cup of salvation.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit,
that through us the light of your glory
may shine in all the world.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Sending Forth of the People of God
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HYMN: O-so-so / Come Now, O Prince Of Peace

Come now, O Prince of Peace,
make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile your people.

Come now, O God of love,
make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile your people.

Come now and set us free,
O God, our Saviour,
come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile all nations.

Come Hope of unity,
make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile all nations.

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BLESSING

Come now,
O Prince of Peace, God of love, Hope, and Joy;
make us one body.
Come, O Lord Jesus;
reconcile all people, all nations.

May the blessing of God almighty,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

SENDING SONG: May God's blessing be upon you now

May God's blessing be upon you now,
may you know of God's great love for you.
May God's blessing be upon you now,
right where you are.

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