

## KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

December 24, 2023

Advent 4

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 Biddegal 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

***Here we meet.***

***Here we encounter.***

***Here we worship God.***

Here we will encounter Christ,  
the One who is Love for all of creation.  
Here we will celebrate what it means,  
to be the people of God in this place.

***Here we will give thanks  
for the Word made Flesh.  
Here we will experience  
the Love of Christ.  
Here we will worship God.***

### **LIGHTING THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE**

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Love.  
As we light our fourth Advent Candle,  
we celebrate God's Love.  
We light the Advent Candle and remind ourselves that God is Love.  
God loves the world, and we live in the Hope  
that God will use us to continue building God's Love  
in our world this Advent Season.

(lights the Fourth Candle)

**HYMN:** Christ Be Our Light (Verses 1, 2, 3, and 4) 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.

*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.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!*

*Shine in your church gathered today.*

Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your church gathered today.*

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others  
walls made of living stone.

*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 Surprising Love and Hope,  
we come this morning to the manger,  
gazing lovingly on the Child born to bring hope to the world.  
Open our hearts this morning,  
and help us to be guided by the Light of Jesus Christ,  
that we may truly feel the power of your love  
and bring that love, with joy, to all we meet.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. AMEN.

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

***Lord, we have lived far too long in dark places of our own making.  
We have walled ourselves in, shut the world out,  
and held ourselves captive to our fear and failings.  
Free us from this place, Lord.  
Return us to a life in your presence,  
where we may face the trials of this world with you by our side.***

***Restore your light to our eyes,  
that we may behold anew your love in our lives.  
Hear us and help us, we pray.  
We wait in eager anticipation,  
for the glory of your salvation today. Amen.***

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

In Christ, there is life.  
With Christ, there is freedom.  
Because of Christ, there is hope.  
Hear then the words of Christ to us:

'Your sins are forgiven'.  
***Thanks be to God.***

### **PEACE**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
***And also with you.***

### **HYMN: O Holy Night**

O holy night! the stars are brightly shining;  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope- the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!  
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!  
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!  
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,  
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.  
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,  
Here came the Wise Men from Orient land.  
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,  
In all our trials born to be our Friend.  
He knows our need— to our weakness is no stranger.  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,  
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.  
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Here came the Wise Men from Orient land.  
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The Service of the Word
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## **BIBLE READINGS**

### **Romans 16: 25-27**

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

### **Luke 1: 26-38**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 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. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

## REFLECTION

God of love and power,  
you are revealed to us in your Word,  
in accounts of prophecy and fulfillment  
that direct our attention to Jesus Christ.  
Illumine us now as we hear your Word proclaimed,  
that we may open our hearts to him,  
yearn for his coming in glory,  
and serve him with joy. Amen.

In a Christmas cartoon I came across in a magazine, a little child called Billy is wandering through various stores in a kind of family circus. Billy sees lots of signs that say "Don't forget Christmas Candy; don't forget wrapping paper, don't forget to visit Santa, don't forget last minute gifts", and so on. Then, Billy goes home and sits in front of his diary trying to describe what he has seen on that Christmas day. He keeps thinking and thinking and feels something is missing. So, he draws a picture of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus and the star and writes on it "Don't forget" Well, I guess Billy really got his Christmas right. In the middle of many events happening to celebrate our Christmas, we, too, are to keep thinking and asking ourselves, "Where is Christmas to be found?"

Among the many images of Christmas, the nativity scene is one of the most familiar ones you can see. At one time the scene was the most common thing to find on a Christmas card, and of course every school play, or Sunday school presentation, had its moment when three or four shepherds dressed in bath robes, some wisemen with foil crowns, and a few children dressed up as sheep, and donkeys, and cows would gather around a young Mary and Joseph and gaze at a little bundle laying in a small pile of straw in a small manger. There is a feeling of warmth and peace to that scene, which normally summarizes the essence of Christmas to many people. To many, the scene is where their Christmas is to be found. However, this doesn't appear to be the case with our world any more.

I guess that some of you have watched a film or video called 'Santa Clause'. The Santa Clause I & II & III, those films were not quite a success in the film industry this world but they were one of the few best-selling Disney movies in the video industry. Tens of thousands of copies have been being sold every month throughout the world. Tim Allen, the Santa character in that film, is a divorced father of a child. Tim is chosen to be the Santa Clause by the land of mystery in the North Pole. Lots of fun stories are in the films, telling the spirit of Christmas as 'sharing and caring'. The movies were full of imaginative, fun stories relating Santa and his origin, huge Christmas presents factory hidden somewhere in the North Pole, which is run by hundreds of little elves, and even tooth fairy. If you watch the movies, you'll find

yourselves very much wanting to believe in things like elf, tooth fairy and Santa Clause and his reindeers. Such a beautiful, touching Christmas story treating every single child in such a precious way. Santa risks everything in his life, just fulfilling his sacred obligations as the bearer of Christmas gifts to children around the world.

I thoroughly enjoyed the videos. However, when the movies were finished, I found myself coming back to my reality with a question: "Where is our Christmas to be found?" The movies, Santa Cause I and II don't mention a thing, a single thing about baby Christ, Mary or Joseph at all. I might sound like throwing cold water on this exciting Christmas atmosphere but I think we must ask ourselves and our families and friends, "Where is Christmas to be found?" What will our next generations and their next, and next generations be like, having grown up with all sorts of beautiful, touching stories about Christmas and its origin that have nothing to do with Christ and his birth? Where is their Christmas going to be found?

In those films, there always runs a sense of something magic, wonderful to be about to happen. Just before the birth of Jesus there was a similar sense of exciting expectation and hope. People were waiting and wondering. They felt like something wonderful was about to happen. The Scriptures had promised the coming of the Messiah, and rumors were widespread that he was coming at any time. He was going to turn the world around and deliver Israel from all her enemies of centuries. But if those same people, who were so high with expectation, had gone to a backyard stable in the town of Bethlehem one starry night, they might have said, That's it? Is that all? All that hype for this?? But actually, in this case, the reality was greater than the expectation. No one could have guessed how this child would change the world. No one could have imagined the impact he would have on world history and the change he would make in people's lives.

Mary was the first person in the world to carry the Gospel. What an enormous privilege was hers. She understood this privilege and worshiped God because of it. She sang in Luke chapter 1, "From now on all generations will call me blessed. (Luke 1:48)." Mark Lowry, a well-known hymn writer, puts the mystery to music in his song, 'Mary Did You Know?' The words go like this:

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?  
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new;  
and this child that you delivered will soon deliver you?  
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would give sight to the blind man?  
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would calm a storm with his hand?  
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?  
And, when you kissed your little baby you've kissed the face of God?  
Oh, Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know? So long ago?

Jesus was born in a world in which tyranny ruled everywhere, and poverty and hunger and suffering were overwhelming everywhere. There was no hope, no vision, even no reason to move on. And when you look at the time of Jesus realistically you might easily think that it was so foolish of Mary when she sang for joy to God as she did in today passage in Luke's gospel. What was there to celebrate in Judea 2000 years ago? And what today, here in this small global village too? Where 60 % of the world population is so poor, going through everyday struggles to get food for their families; 40 % has to live their next month without a job, and millions of children under six suffer and die of malnutrition or diseases like AIDS every six months. What about us here in Australia? People we love get sick and die, the jobs and the security of those around us in our lives are continually threatened, our children's futures are uncertain, and the numbers of teenagers' suicide is increasing every year. What is here to celebrate Christmas? I mean, real Christmas.

Mary was the first person in the world to carry the Gospel and she celebrated the good news by singing and living it. The exactly same thing is applied to us. Every single individual Christian must sing the same song that Mary did two thousand years ago. Every individual Christian is the person to carry the Gospel in this world. Gospel always has to be a good news to those who hear it. The same Spirit that was working in Mary and her life is still today with us and among us. The same person to whom Mary sang two thousand years ago is still alive with us and all humanity in the world. And, dear friends, this is where our Christmas is to be found. Jesus Christ is our song; he is our vision; he is our reason to live; he is our Christmas. Amen.

**HYMN**    Away in a manger, no crib for a bed    TiS 318

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;  
the stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,  
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.  
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from on high,  
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay  
close by me forever, and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,  
and fit us for heaven to live with you there.

Words: Anon. 1885

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## **CHRISTMAS BOWL – Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love SHOWING LOVE TO THE MOST VULNERABLE**

Sisters Srinidhi and Mahira are Sri Lankan refugees who have been living in refugee camps in India for decades. Like many refugees from Sri Lanka, they were forced to flee due to the conflict and violence in their home country. They are both widows who lost their husbands while in India and after all these years, they have never lived apart. Despite being independent, travelling outside the camp to the nearest hospital is too difficult, particularly with Mahira's health problems. Srinidhi explained, "Can't you see my sister? She can't even walk, how is she going to go to the hospital? That's why we want the hospital to come to us, the health workers to come to us. She comes and sees me regularly." Fortunately, Act for Peace's local partner in India, Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation, which is run by refugees themselves, have been providing crucial support and assistance in the camps for four decades.

### **OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER**

Generous God,  
you have given us all that we have and all that we are.  
We thank you for the opportunity  
to respond to your love and generosity  
by sharing our gifts with others.  
Our hearts sing with joy as we work with you  
to bring true peace and justice to our world.  
As we prepare for the coming of your Son,  
may our lives proclaim your good news for all  
throughout the earth. Amen.

### **ANNOUNCEMENT**

#### **PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**

We remember you, Jesus, born in a stable  
because there was no room for you in Bethlehem  
other than this place among the animals.

We remember Mary so filled with joy  
that she could only treasure all of these things in her heart.  
We remember the Herods who were so threatened by your love.  
We remember prophets, like Isaiah,  
who prepared people before you to imagine

that light could shine so bright  
and dared generations upon generations to dream.

We pray for those in this community  
and throughout the world who are poor and houseless.  
We pray for refugees whose children are still being born in stables,  
tents, and whatever shelter can be found.  
We think of those who are not able to be with loved ones this Christmas,  
for those who work in hospitals and aged-care facilities,  
and for other essential services so we may be safe and secure.

And we remember those who are sick or lonely this Christmas.  
We remember 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.  
Pour out the warmth of your love upon them  
and grant them peace today.

Be with all of us, we pray.  
Bless our homes and celebrations.  
Keep us safe in your love.  
Empower us to share this love  
with those that most need to find light.  
We pray these things in the name of Jesus  
who became the 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.***

## INVITATION

This is the Lord's table.  
Our Saviour invites those who trust him  
to share the feast which he has prepared.

Jesus said,  
"I am the bread of life.  
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,  
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."  
Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

**COMMUNION HYMN:** Let us talents and tongues employ TiS 537

Let us talents and tongues employ,  
reaching out with a shout of joy;  
bread is broken, the wine is poured,  
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!  
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Christ is able to make us one,  
at the table he sets the tone,  
teaching people to live to bless,  
love in word and in deed express.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!  
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Jesus calls us in, sends us out  
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,  
gives us love to tell, bread to share;  
God-Immanuel everywhere.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!  
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

## **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.***

It is right to praise you, God, Lord of all creation;  
in your love you made us for yourself.

When we turned away you did not reject us,  
but came to meet us in your Son.

***You embraced us as your children and welcomed us to sit and eat with you.***

In Christ you shared our life that we might live in him and he in us.

***He opened his arms of love upon the cross  
and made for all the perfect sacrifice for sin.***

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.”

***God, we do this in remembrance of him: his body is the bread of life.***

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.”

***God, we do this in remembrance of him: his blood is shed for all.***

As we proclaim his death and celebrate his rising in glory, send your Holy Spirit  
that this bread and this wine may be to us the body and blood of your dear Son.

***As we eat and drink these holy gifts make us one in Christ, our risen Lord.***

With your whole church throughout the world, we offer you this sacrifice of  
praise and lift our voice to join the eternal song in heaven:

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

***your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Amen.***

## **BREAKING OF THE BREAD**

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.  
The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.  
The gifts of God for the people of God.

## **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**

Almighty God,  
we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.  
Send us out in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

The Sending Forth of the People of God
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**HYMN:** The Virgin Mary TiS 307

The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,  
the Virgin Mary had a baby boy,  
the Virgin Mary had a baby boy,  
and they say that his name was Jesus.

*(Refrain)*

*He come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom,  
he come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom,  
O yes, believer,*

*O yes, believer,  
he come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom,*

The angels sang when the baby born,  
the angels sang when the baby born,  
the angels sang when the baby born,  
and proclaim him the baby Jesus.

*(Refrain)*

The wise men saw where the baby born,  
the wise men saw where the baby born,  
the wise men saw where the baby born,  
and they say that his name was Jesus.

*(Refrain)*

Anon, West Indies

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## **BLESSING**

Look forward in hope  
to the coming of your Saviour,  
prepare the way for Christ your Lord;  
welcome him with love and faith  
when he comes in glory.

And the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always. Amen.

**SENDING SONG:** May God's blessing surround you each day

May God's blessing surround you each day,  
as you trust Him and walk in His way.  
May His presence within  
guard and keep you from sin,  
go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

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