

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
December 31, 2023
Christmas 1

The Gathering of the People of God

WELCOME & GREETING

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

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth, peace and goodwill toward all.

***For out of God's own being,
Jesus has come to bring light and love to all people.***

Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us,
come to gather our tears and laughter,
our work and our play, into God's loving embrace.

***Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth, peace and goodwill toward all.***

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, wonderful creator,
you have made yourself known in your Son, Jesus.
In his birth you have restored the dignity of human nature.
In his death and resurrection you have revealed to us
the fullness of your grace and mercy.
In your love, and by the power of the Holy Spirit,
let us share in his divine life – even as he shared of our humanity.
As we hear and reflect on your word this day,
help us to respond with believing hearts and to put our faith into practice.
We ask in his name. Amen

HYMN: Joyful, joyful, we adore you TiS 152

Joyful, joyful, we adore you,
God of glory, God of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before you
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
drive the dark of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day.

All your works with joy surround you,
earth and heav'n reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
centre of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
singing bird and flowing fountain
call to praise you joyfully.

You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
well-spring of the joy of living,
ocean-depth of happy rest.

You our Father, Christ our brother,
all are yours who live in love;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to your joy above.

PD; text, Henry Van Dyke

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

***Merciful God,
we come today to lay all our troubles at your feet.
We are sorry for when we have been harsh with others and with ourselves.
We are sorry for when we have been ungracious
towards both the deserving and the undeserving.
We are sorry for when we have failed to love.
Please help us to allow your gracious goodness to flow through our lives. Amen.***

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Hear these words from Isaiah 40, 'Comfort, comfort, my people, says your God.'
May today and each day you know God's comfort, peace and consolation.
Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:
Our sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

PEACE

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

HYMN: Lord, I lift your name on high P&W 736

Lord, I lift your name on high;
Lord, I love to sing your praises.
I'm so glad you're in my life;
I'm so glad you came to save us.

*You came from heaven to earth to show the way,
from the earth to the cross, my debt to pay.
From the cross to the grave,
from the grave to the sky;
Lord, I lift your name on high.*

Lord, I lift your name on high;
Lord, I love to sing your praises.
I'm so glad you're in my life;
I'm so glad you came to save us.

*You came from heaven to earth to show the way,
from the earth to the cross, my debt to pay.
From the cross to the grave,
from the grave to the sky;
Lord, I lift your name on high. (X2)*

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 61: 10-62:3

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my whole being shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. 1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn and her salvation like a burning torch. 2 The nations shall see your vindication and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. 3 You shall be a beautiful crown in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Luke 2:22-40

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, 30 for my eyes have seen

your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” 33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.” 36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him.

PPT PRESENTATION

REFLECTION

Today is the 1st Sunday after Christmas and the last day of the year 2023. Tomorrow, we will all be faced with the annual challenge: learning to write a New Year date on all our important papers, letters, checks. “2023 will become 2024.”

Our Gospel reading from the second chapter of Luke proclaims Jesus as the light for revelation. Simeon was waiting to see this light, and it was revealed to him as Jesus was brought into the temple as a baby. And he sang out, "My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Into the darkness of this world came the light of God, Jesus Christ. In the time of Mary and Joseph, people yearned with all their might for salvation--from poverty, the oppression of the occupying Roman army, from Herod, the sick and gloomy oppressor who ruled their lives. Religious fanatics were increasing in number all the time. People rushed after each new one, only to be disappointed. The Son of God, the bearer of peace, came to a world of turmoil, war. It was a time of violence between people and governments. He came as a child who grew into a man who was crucified for us. Jesus is the Light of the World. Arise, shine, for your light has come. Our world is lit by God's holiness.

Let me tell you a story of a young man who some 40 years ago stood in the cave in Bethlehem, in the space which tradition has claimed as the birthplace of Jesus. As he stood there, he noticed the diverse crowd standing close to each other, for it is a small space. There were pilgrims from around the world, all there because they loved the Lord. And one voice began to sing, in German, the Christmas hymn we

know as "Silent Night." And one by one, in the first languages of that assembled band of Christians, came a glorious singing of "Silent Night." Despite the differences of language, there was no need of interpretation. And for that young man, it was a moment of deep commitment to Jesus and it was a time of insight--Jesus is indeed the one for all people, for all nations. This is a time to welcome each other and to share the light of the world.

Long time ago, there was a charming legend that on Christmas Eve the Christ Child wandered throughout the world looking for places where he would be welcomed. Those who loved him--hoping he would find their homes--placed lighted candles in the window to invite him in. No one knew what he would look like when he came. He might be a homeless. Blind. A poor and lonely child. So devout Christians welcomed all into their homes who knocked on their door on Christmas Day. To turn anyone away may have meant rejecting the Christ Child. At Christmas, we remember that the Christ Child is wandering our roads, looking for homes where He will be given warmth and shelter. May He find a place in our hearts and in our homes where there is room for Him. Is Christ knocking now? Will you open the door? Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." And he also said, "You are the light of the world." In these simple words we have the summary of what it means to be a Christian. Our belief is "Christ is the Light of the world." "You are the light of the world" sums up our plain obligation to reflect this light. Just a little bit of light can make a great deal of difference. It could be the reassuring light at the other end of the tunnel for someone. We need to light up the lives of others with love and joy and kindness. A little song comes to mind: "This Little Light of Mine."

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
let it shine, let it shine, oh let it shine.

Ev'rywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.
Ev'rywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.
Ev'rywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine,
let it shine, let it shine, oh let it shine.

Jesus gave it to me, I'm gonna let it shine.
Jesus gave it to me, I'm gonna let it shine.
Jesus gave it to me, I'm gonna let it shine,
let it shine, let it shine, oh let it shine.

Well, will your little light shine? That's the big question. And your answer will make a big difference to the world around you. "Arise, shine, for your light has come." "The

people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined."

You may know the story of the man who refused to go to church with his family on Christmas Eve because he didn't believe the Gospel story. As he was reading the paper, he heard a noise at the front picture window. The snow was coming down hard and the wind had picked up. He went to investigate and discovered two small sparrows that had flown into the window. Other sparrows were sitting on the bushes, cold and shivering. He felt sorrow for them and got on his coat and went out and picked up the injured birds, carrying them to the warmth of the barn where he thought the other birds would come in and find shelter. He left the doors open, but the other birds didn't follow. So he placed breadcrumbs as a path. Surely, he thought, the hungry little birds would follow. They didn't. So he tried to chase them into the barn. It didn't work. Finally, frustrated, he sat down and thought, "If I could just talk to them and get them to know I want to help them and save them. But," he thought, "I can't do it unless I become one of them--become one of them!" Then the church bells began to ring and the man knelt in the deep snow realizing he now knew this peace on earth the angels sang about. And he said, "Thank you, God, for becoming one of us."

When I think of Christmas, I think of gifts--that of Jesus to us, the gifts of the Magi, the gifts we give to each other as signs of love and care. What kind of gifts are we to each other? Perhaps this final little story might give some clue. There was a family of three--Mom, Dad, and little six-year old Peter—who were poor and absolutely no money to buy any Christmas presents. Nevertheless, they were inventive in celebrating Christmas. They decided to make pictures of the presents they would like to give one another if money were no object. So they drew pictures or cut out pictures from catalogues and magazines. They put the pictures into boxes, stuck some old ribbons on them, and put them under a little tangled old Christmas tree. On Christmas morning the tree was heaped with presents. The gifts were only pictures, to be sure, but they were symbols of Christmas giving. There was a shiny new car for Dad and a red motor boat, some golf clubs, a new suit, some sweaters. Mom found her dream house and a diamond necklace, dresses, coats, and a vacation cruise. Most of the make-believe presents were for little Peter. There were pictures of a camping tent, a new bicycle, a pedal car, and all kinds of toys and games. Now, of course, Mom and Dad didn't expect anything from little Pete. But Peter crawled under the tree and pulled out a gift he had prepared all by himself. He handed his present to his parents with a smile and they opened it. They found a picture drawn with first-grade crayons. It was a picture of three people standing together with big smiles on their faces. They had their arms around each other. And under the picture, Peter had printed a single word--"us." The light dawned and tears of joy filled the eyes of the parents because they realized that, in years to come, they may be able to give some of those Christmas presents they had only imagined,

but they could never give a present more precious than the one they had received that year--the gift of love they had for each other.

The Christ Child is found whenever greed is overcome by generosity, whenever hatred is squeezed out by love, whenever war is overwhelmed by peace, whenever despair gives way to hope. Christ's love can fill our hearts and bind us together. Friends in Christ! Into the darkness of this world has come the Light of God, Jesus Christ. Rejoice!
Amen.

HYMN I am the light of the world All together 128

*I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love, you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.*

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the shepherds
have found their way home,
the work of Christmas is begun!

*I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love, you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.*

To find the lost and lonely one,
to heal that broken soul with love,
to feed the hungry children with warmth and good food,
to feel the earth below the sky above!

*I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love, you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.*

To free the prisoner from his chains,
to make the powerful care,
to rebuild the nations with strength and goodwill,
to call a man your brother everywhere.

*I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love, you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.*

To bring hope to every task you do,
to dance at a baby's new birth,
to make music in an old man's heart,
and sing to the colours of the earth!

*I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love, you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.*

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
In this time of giving, we are grateful for what we have received from You.
In this time of sharing, we are challenged to share what we have with others.
Receive our gifts with our thanks,
as we dedicate them to the outworking of Your Kingdom,
and the incarnation of Your love in action here and across the world.
In the name of the Christ-Child. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Merciful God,
There are many who today long for consolation.
There are many who carry wounds in their hearts.
There are many who continue to grieve.
May they know you are with them,
and may we all be vessels of consolation.

Gracious God,
There are many today who seek salvation.
There are many who long to know truth.
There are many who desire wisdom.
May those who seek find the mystery of God,

and may we all be willing to walk beside them.

Loving God,

There are many today who are waiting.

There are many who long for revelation.

There are many who hope for an answer to their prayers.

May all who are with us today, and those who we remember in our hearts and carry in our minds, know the peace that passes understanding and find rest in your loving goodness.

In Silence, let us pray for those who are not well,
for Brian and Rhonda, Prema and Priya, Jim and Bobbie,
Denis and Dolly, Jim Bird, Naghuia,
and others whom we name in our hearts.

Give our brothers and sisters your healing and comfort.
Pour out the warmth of your love upon them and grant them peace today.
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 Sending Forth of the People of God
--

HYMN: Lord of the Dance TiS 242

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,
at Bethlehem I had my birth:

(Refrain)

Dance then, wherever you may be;

*"I am the Lord of the dance," said he;
"and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance," said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John,
they came with me and the dance went on:
(Refrain)

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
the holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,
and they left me there on a cross to die:
(Refrain)

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;
but I am the dance and I still go on:
(Refrain)

They cut me down and I leap up high,
I am the life that will never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:
"I am the Lord of the Dance," said he:
(Refrain)

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BLESSING

Go in peace, love and care for one another in the name of Christ.
Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.
Let all that you do be done in love.
and 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 the mind of Christ my Saviour TIS 609

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self denying,
this is victory.

May I run the race before me
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

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