

Sunday 1st December 2024 @ Kogarah UC @ 10am

Advent 1 - Hope

Welcome

Acknowledgement of Country

Since time immemorial, the Indigenous people have been caring for this land. They watched for the seasons, knowing when to harvest and when to plant, knowing when to stay and when to move, knowing how to read the signs of the time. As we gather today, we acknowledge the wisdom of the traditional owners of this land, the Bidjegal People of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Lighting the Christ Candle

God is here!

God is always here!

God is with us!

God is always with us!

Saying who we are

We are a congregation and community ...

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.

Call to Worship

In this time of Advent,

in this time of waiting,

in this time of preparation,

may we listen for the signs,

may we be ready to hear from prophets,

may we prepare our hearts with hope and love,

Sing: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

<https://youtu.be/iO7ySn-Swwc?si=-6lTHnhrgZSLtxN7>

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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Opening Prayer

Creator God,

As we gather here today in worship, may we be thankful for all the good things that have happened in the last year, may we remember the hurts with grace and the griefs with gentleness.

May we use this time to move into a new beginning intentionally.

Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

We are people of hope.

So we light the Candle of Hope with our heartfull of anticipation.

Believing that the Kingdom is near, and God's light will shine bright in the midst of our darkness

.

Sing Advent Song v1 *Hope is a child* Brian Wren

<https://youtu.be/ofDpce5uyRo?si=rTpieLn3aN4KixI5>

Refrain

When God is a child, there's joy in our song.

The last shall be first

and the weak shall be strong,

and none shall be afraid.

**Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.**

Refrain

When God is a child, there's joy in our song.

The last shall be first

and the weak shall be strong,

and none shall be afraid.

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Prayer of Confession

Let us take a moment to leave behind all those things that are no longer serving us, which we choose to leave in the last year so we can look forward to the new year.

(A time of silence)

Merciful God,

you know our struggles and our concerns.

May we leave them in your hands,

only taking what will serve us into the future.

Because most of us are slow learners, lukewarm believers, yet loquacious excuse-makers, let us pause, take stock,

Because we have sometimes busied ourselves religiously, as if the success of God's kingdom depended solely on us:

Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Because we sometimes opt out, and with a perverse piety leave everything up to God and the holy angels:

Christ have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Because your mercy is over all your works, and your grace is greater than our pride, foolishness and weakness:

Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Have pity, loving God, on our little lives and our errant ways. Forgive our sins which are many and diverse, correct the distorted view we have of ourselves and the world, lead us from discouragement to hope, and restore within us a passion to seek your will and do it. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen!

Words of Grace

(Adapted from Psalm 25)

Let us hear the words of the psalmist, who says:

Lead me in your truth – teach it to me

because you are the God who saves me.

God, remember your compassion and faithful love – they are forever.

Amen.

Sing: *Star-Child* Seasons 1-31 © 1994, 1997 Hope Publishing Company; text, Shirley Erena Murray Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

<https://youtu.be/MQxERztfU5I?si=ul11IBm8 Ppsq8l8>

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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Pass the peace of Christ

Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Psalm 25:1–10

1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Sing: *Be thou my vision* E.H. Hull; M. E. Byrne, Together in Song 547

<https://youtu.be/ihJAJA4ibEs?si=AOPnOQllqspni-lx>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
naught be all else to me, save that thou art -
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my armour, my sword for the fight,
be thou my dignity, thou my delight;
thou my soul's shelter and thou my high tower:
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I scorn and the world's empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only the first in my heart,
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Words from *The Poem Book of the Gael*

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A Reading from the Christian Scriptures

Luke 21:25–36

25 “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. **26** People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **27** Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. **28** Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

29 Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; **30** as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. **31** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. **32** Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. **33** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. **34** “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, **35** like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. **36** Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Offering

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING

God of Abundance,

On our own, what we have to give is small in comparison to the needs in our world.

Yet we bring what we can, knowing that together as a community, we offer it in hope that you, God, will put it to best use. May this mustard seed be lovingly nurtured into a tree that is fruitful and life giving.

Give us the humility to be faithful gardeners so that Your Kingdom may be realised on earth.

Amen.

Reflection

Jeremiah 33:14–16, Luke 21:25–36

Let me start today by asking you to remember a time when you were waiting for something special. Maybe it was a holiday, a birthday, or even Christmas. Think back to when you were a child, full of excitement, counting down the days. Do you remember how every day seemed like an eternity as you waited for that big event to arrive? Your heart would race with anticipation, and everything around you would be preparing for the big moment. I remember when I was a kid, waiting for my birthday. It felt like the day would never come, and yet, each day was filled with little signs that the big day was getting closer. My mom would start talking about the birthday party, we would decorate the house, and there was a buzz of excitement in the air. Every little thing, like seeing the presents wrapped on the table, made me more and more excited. The waiting was almost as fun as the event itself!

Now, we all know that waiting can be hard. It can be filled with uncertainty and impatience. But there's something magical about the time leading up to a special occasion, isn't there? Whether it's Christmas or any other special event, we look forward to it with joy and hope. The season of Advent, which we begin today, invites us to enter that kind of waiting — a waiting with hope, with purpose, and with anticipation. We are preparing for something wonderful: the birth of Jesus at Christmas, and ultimately, his return to bring about a new world.

In the readings today, from the book of Jeremiah and the Gospel of Luke, we are reminded of a different kind of waiting. This waiting isn't just about the countdown to a single day, but rather a long, patient watch for the fulfillment of God's promises. In Jeremiah 33:14-16, the prophet speaks of a time when God will fulfill his promises. God will bring about a righteous branch, a king who will rule with justice and righteousness. The people of Israel had been waiting for this for a long

time. It wasn't just a quick event. It was a promise that stretched out through years of hardship, a hope that was held onto through seasons of struggle. They waited, trusting that God's word would come true. And then we turn to the passage from Luke 21:25-36. Here, Jesus speaks of his return — the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises. He tells us there will be signs: signs in the sun, moon, and stars, signs on the earth. The nations will be in distress, and people will be filled with fear. But he also tells us to stand up, to lift our heads, because our redemption is drawing near. That's what Advent is all about: waiting with hope, with expectation, and yes, with trust that God will bring about what he has promised. Just like children waiting for Christmas, we are called to wait for Christ's return with the same joy and anticipation.

Remember how it felt to be a child during the Christmas season? I'm sure you can picture it clearly. The house decorated with twinkling lights, the tree covered in decorations, and the smell of freshly baked cookies in the kitchen. There was always something different about December. It wasn't just about the decorations or the presents; it was about the excitement, the joy, the waiting. As children, we looked forward to the arrival of Santa Claus, didn't we? The anticipation was thrilling. We knew that when Santa arrived, everything would be wonderful. Gifts would be given, laughter would fill the air, and everyone would be happy. Now, I'm not saying that Santa Claus is the focus of our Advent season, but let's think about how similar the energy of waiting for Santa is to the anticipation of Christ's return. Santa, for children, represents a sense of hope and joy. We knew that he was coming, and we prepared ourselves for the celebration. We cleaned our rooms, we made sure to be extra good, and we wrote our lists. As adults, and especially as Christians, we are called to take that same kind of energy — that same joyful anticipation — and apply it to the coming of Jesus. But there's one important difference: instead of waiting for Santa, we are waiting for the King of Kings, Jesus Christ, whose return is not just about presents and joy, but about salvation, hope, and the restoration of all things.

The season of Advent is a time to prepare not just for Christmas but for the return of Christ. We are invited to be watchful, to stay alert, to keep our hearts and minds open for his arrival, just as we did when we were children waiting for something wonderful. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus talks about signs — signs that indicate his return. The sun, the moon, and the stars will show the way, but these signs may not always be clear. When we look at the world around us, it can sometimes feel like we are living in a time of chaos. There are wars, suffering, injustice, and we may wonder, "Is this the sign that Christ is coming soon?" Or perhaps we're just going through our daily routines, unaware of the signs around us. But Jesus tells

us to look up, to be ready, to watch for his return. The signs may not always be easy to interpret, but they are there. Just like we had to wait for our birthday party, watching for all the little signs leading up to the big day, we are called to wait for Christ's return, knowing that he will come and make everything right.

So, how do we prepare for his coming? How do we wait during this Advent season? One thing we can do is to focus on giving. Advent is a time to prepare our hearts, not just through decorations and shopping, but by focusing on the true spirit of the season: love, joy, peace, and hope. One powerful way to prepare is by focusing on the act of giving, which echoes the spirit of the season. We can give hope to those who are struggling. As we reach out to those who are suffering—whether through illness, loss, or hardship—we can offer words of encouragement, reminding them that they are not alone. We can also give peace by choosing forgiveness when we are hurt, seeking reconciliation, and striving to make peace in a world that often feels divided. Giving love is central to the Advent season, and we can demonstrate this love by taking time to care for those around us, especially those who feel forgotten or unloved. In addition, we can give joy by sharing a kind word or doing something thoughtful for someone else, making a difference in their day.

During Advent, one meaningful way to express our commitment to giving is by participating in the Christmas Bowl initiative. Each year, we take part in this global movement that remembers the struggles of those facing hunger, poverty, and the fear of war. Through our participation, we are reminded that Christ's coming is not just for us but for all people, especially those in need. Similarly, our long-standing involvement in the Kogarah Storehouse ministry reflects our dedication to supporting the vulnerable in our local community. For over 30 years, we have served those in need, providing food and essentials to people who are struggling. This ministry is a practical expression of our commitment to Christ's call to care for "the least of these." As we approach this season, we are reminded that our preparation for Christ's coming involves not only reflecting on his love but actively living it out through acts of service and generosity. In these ways, Advent is not just about waiting for Christ's return, but about embodying his love in our actions. Through giving hope, peace, love, and joy, whether through the Christmas Bowl, the Kogarah Storehouse, or other acts of kindness, we prepare our hearts and the world for the arrival of the Savior. When we live in this way, we begin to experience the kingdom of God already here among us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ! In this season of Advent, let's remember that waiting is not a passive activity. It's an active preparation. It's a time to focus on

the hope we have in Christ, to prepare our hearts, and to give to others in love. As we light the candles of Advent, we remember that each one represents something we can share with the world: hope, peace, joy, and love. As we wait for the coming of Christ, let's approach this season with the joy and energy we had as children, anticipating the arrival of something wonderful. And let's prepare not just by decorating our homes, but by decorating our hearts with love, care, and kindness to others. Amen.

Announcements

Christmas Bowl Liturgy (Indonesia)

Introductory slides (Point out the “disasters” supported by Act for peace

Your impact: Preventing displacement in Indonesia

Slide 1 Eko lives in North Pakuli, Indonesia, with his wife and three-year-old daughter. Eko's family have endured many disasters over the years. Frequent flash flooding has had a serious impact on their income, as their home has been damaged and their seeds and fertiliser were frequently washed away by the rain. Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone countries on Earth. It lies on the Pacific “Ring of Fire” where volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, landslides, drought and forest fires frequently occur.

Slide 2 By working with Church World Service Indonesia, Act for Peace has helped to develop the DREAM program (Disaster Resilience through Enhanced Adaptive Measures) in Central Sulawesi, which aims to strengthen community resilience to the impacts of climate change and to prepare for when disasters strike.

Slide 3 Eko has been an inspirational participant, enthusiastically trialling new, sustainable approaches to farming and the use of organic fertilisers. He now plans to expand these new techniques to more of his land and has been encouraging other farmers in his community to do the same.

Slide 5 Your support can help farming families, like Eko's in Indonesia, to adapt to the changing climate, reducing the risks of being displaced from their homes. “I want to learn how to adapt to the climate. The harvest back in my parents' era could be extraordinary. In my era of climate change, the texture of the soil

gets denser and our income decreases. So how can we farmers get the same results as our parents used to do, but in a different way? By not using excessive chemical fertilisers. Thankfully we gain knowledge from this program.” – Eko

Prayers for Others

God of all strength and wisdom,

We pray for those impacted by climate change, and particularly think of our

neighbours in Indonesia.

For those whose livelihood is impacted by natural disasters and unpredictable weather changes.

For those who have been displaced from their homes and communities.

For those who are rebuilding their lives.

Move in our hearts, to know what we can do to reach out.

Move in our hearts, so that we might seek justice and become better stewards of the earth.

Move in our hearts, to show compassion, embrace our siblings, and love our neighbour as ourselves.

Give us the wisdom to be silent and listen to what they need.

Give us the gift of generosity, to share what we have with others.

Give us the courage to have hope and share this hope with our neighbours.

Loving God, you are our hope.

Strengthen us in our time of need.

Amen.

Sing: “The World is Burning” Advent after COVID & COP 26 (Tune: ‘Woodlands’, 10.10.10.10)

**The world is burning, twinkling lights betray
a damaged conscience, we have lost our way.
Our neighbours drown, we build on solid ground,
as Jesus weeps while songs of praise resound.**

**Within this season darkness clouds each mind,
consumption numbs the pain we ought to find
when hearing news of hunger and of drought,
a stable's birth should soon erase all doubt:**

**the Christ we claim to know, born in the dirt,
while at our doors our neighbours starve and hurt.
So put aside this carolling and praise
until compassion drives our words and ways.**

(Direct from Andrew Pratt 19/11/2021)

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Blessing/Benediction

**As we leave this place and in the upcoming week,
may we be blessed with signs of love, kindness, and truth.
May we find companions on the way to help us see clearly.
And may the peace that passes understanding be ours,
today and always.
Let us go out into the world as beacons of light
in the darkness.**

May we be in right relationship with the earth we walk on, and the people we pass by.

Taking only what we need and sharing with others.

Striving for justice, and reconciliation.

So that we may bring God's hope to our world.

Amen

Exit Song: Like a candle Seasons 3-20

© 1996 Words: Craig Mitchell. Music: Tim Beale and Roger Imms

**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 an angel walking lightly
on this fragile earth of clay,
touching folk with raw compassion,
laughing, playing on the way,
freely living ev'ry moment
in the mystery of grace.**

**Giving, dying, living, rising,
see the beauty of God's face.**

**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,
making turns we least expect,
when the Spirit churns within us,
know God's power through the test.**

**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 ev'ry 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.**

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