

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

8 December 2024

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:

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, 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.

KUC VISION STATEMENTS

***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 CANDLE: Hope & Peace

The first candle is lit.

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: When God is a child

(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)

Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.

(Refrain)

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OPENING PRAYER & PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of power,

you sent messengers to help us prepare for Jesus' coming.

Make us ready to hear your good news today.

Come into our presence with your gentleness and strength.

By the power of your Spirit,

touch us so that we may touch others with your love.

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

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: Christ, be our light 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)

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)

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.
(Refrain)

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

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.
(Refrain)

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Malachi 3:1–4

1 See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like washers’ soap; 3 he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Luke 1:68–79

68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his child David, 70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. 72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors and has remembered his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 79 to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Luke 3:1–6

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

REFLECTION

I’d like to begin today’s reflection by sharing a story from a long time ago, when I was in Korea. When I was in high school, I went camping with my friends for the first time. I was so excited and wanted everything to go perfectly, so I made sure to check my camping checklist a million times. I packed everything I thought we would need—tents, sleeping bags, food, and even a flashlight. I was ready! We finally arrived at the campsite, and I felt so proud of how prepared I was. But when it was time to set up the tent, things started to go wrong. I opened my backpack... and realized I had forgotten the most important part: the tent poles! So, I had a tent, but no way to put it up. Next, I pulled out my flashlight, only to find that I hadn’t packed any batteries! I was holding a flashlight... that didn’t light up. And then, when it was time to eat, I proudly pulled out a can of soup, thinking it would be an easy dinner. But... I forgot to bring a can opener. So there we were, looking at the can of soup, but no way to open it. I had packed everything... except what I actually needed! I was so prepared... but not really! In the same way, we can think we’re preparing for Christmas by doing all the traditional things—buying gifts, decorating the house, making holiday plans—but what about preparing our hearts? What if we have everything on the outside, but we’ve forgotten to truly make room for Jesus?

The season of Advent is a time to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. But what does it really mean to prepare? For many people, Christmas is all about gifts, family gatherings, and decorations. But as followers of Christ, our preparation should go much deeper. Advent is a time to clear the path and make room for Jesus—both in our hearts and in the lives of others. In Luke 3:1-6, we read about John the Baptist, who was called to prepare the way for Jesus. His message was simple: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight” (Luke 3:4). In ancient times,

when a king was coming, people would clear the roads to make them smooth. In the same way, we are called to clear the way in our hearts and relationships to make room for Jesus. But what does this mean for us today? Why do we need to prepare? We celebrate Christmas every year, but do we really understand why we celebrate? During Advent, we light candles each week to symbolize hope, joy, peace, and love—but do we truly long for these things? Do we expect them to fill our hearts, or do we just go through the motions? To answer these questions, we need to first discover the real meaning of Christmas.

What does Christmas mean to us? What does Christmas mean to others? What if we asked people who are struggling what Christmas means to them? What would those who are poor say about Christmas? What would people who are lonely say? How about those who are sick or grieving the loss of a loved one? What would refugees say about Christmas? For them, does Christmas still have the same meaning as it does for us? These questions challenge us to think deeply about why we celebrate Christmas. If we are truly preparing for Jesus to come into our lives, we must recognize that the meaning of Christmas is not just about our own joy and comfort—it's about bringing hope, joy, peace, and love to those who need it most. In Luke 1:68-79, Zechariah praises God for sending Jesus to bring salvation to his people. Jesus came to give us hope and peace, not just for ourselves, but for the world. As we prepare for Christmas, we need to reflect on what this season is really about. It's about God's love for us and his desire to bring healing and restoration to the broken world around us.

John the Baptist's message to "prepare the way" means that we are to make room in our hearts and our lives for Christ to enter and make a difference. But this preparation isn't just about us—it's also about how we can help others experience the love and grace of God. Just as John the Baptist cleared the path for people to meet Jesus, we can clear the way for others by showing kindness, compassion, and love. There are people around us—family members, friends, neighbours, and even strangers—who may be struggling. They might be lonely, financially burdened, or emotionally hurt. What if, this Christmas, we focused on clearing the path for them to experience the love of Christ? Maybe it's a phone call to a distant relative, an act of kindness to a neighbour, or a prayer for someone who is grieving. These small actions can help others experience the love and hope of Christ. It's not just about giving presents, but about giving of ourselves—our time, our love, and our compassion. Luke 3:5 tells us, "Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth." These words remind us that the world is full of pain and struggle. But we are called to smooth the paths for those who are suffering. By being generous, offering a helping hand, or just showing someone that we care, we can bring hope and joy to those who need it most. Think about the people around you. There may be someone in your life who is struggling in ways you can't see. One simple act of kindness—

whether it's a word of encouragement, a small gift, or just your presence—can change their whole day. When we do these things, we are preparing the way for them to experience the love of Christ.

Finally, Luke 3:6 says, “All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Christmas is not just about presents or decorations—it’s about the gift of salvation that God gave us through Jesus. He came to save us, not to condemn us. Christmas is the celebration of that salvation—the greatest gift we could ever receive. So, as we prepare for Christmas, let’s remember that it’s not about the commercial side of the season. It’s about sharing the gift of Jesus with the world. Instead of focusing on what others may or may not say, let’s focus on how we can be the hands and feet of Jesus. Let’s prepare the way for others to experience His love by showing grace, kindness, and generosity.

This Christmas, let’s pray that God will help us clear the paths in our hearts and relationships. Let’s pray for the courage to be generous, to forgive, and to make space for God to work in the lives of others. "Jesus, I want you to become greater in my life. Help me to make a path for others to find You. Help me to smooth the rough roads in the lives of those around me, and show them Your love and salvation." As we celebrate the birth of Christ, let’s remember that He came to bring us peace, joy, and salvation. May our lives reflect the hope and love that Christmas is all about.

As I conclude today’s reflection, I want to ask you one question. I hope that you will think about it this week, next week, and even after the Christmas celebration is over, and find your own answer.

What does Christmas really mean to you?

What does John’s call to "prepare the way" mean for your life?

Who is around you that might need to hear the good news of Jesus this Christmas?

As we reflect on these questions, let’s consider how we can bring the true meaning of Christmas to life—not just for ourselves, but for those around us. Advent is not just about waiting for Jesus to come again—it’s about preparing our hearts to welcome him in every way we can. Amen.

HYMN Make me a channel of your peace TiS 607

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me bring your love;

where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;

and where there’s doubt, true faith in you.

(Refrain)

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
where there is darkness, let me bring your light;
and where there's sadness, ever joy.
(Refrain)

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

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CHRISTMAS BOWL

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 Gaza.
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 pray especially today for Dennis and Robyn Lyons,
Brian and Rhonda, Prema and Priya,
Bobbie and the extended family in their time of loss,
Denis and Dolly, Naghuia,
John and Sue and especially John's mother;
Peter and Sue; Dinah; Ern Edwards; Godfrey; Jim Bird;
Sylvia and for 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 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
(Korean & English)

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

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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