

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
22 December 2024
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:

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. We commit to listening to Indigenous wisdom and walking together for truth, reconciliation and justice for all.

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 CANDLE: Hope & Peace & Joy & Love

(Light 3 Advent candles)

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.

(light the Fourth Candle)

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)

Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Savior is born.
(Refrain)

Love is a flame that burns in our heart.
Jesus has come and will never depart.
(Refrain)

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OPENING PRAYER & PRAYER OF CONFESSION

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.

Now in silence, let us take a moment to put down the burdens we are carrying.
(A time of silence)

Loving God,
You know all that is going on today and all that has gone on in the past week.
We come to you in faith, trusting in your righteousness, laying down our burdens.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

DECLARATION 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!*

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With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Micah 5:2–5a

2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, 5 and he shall be the one of peace.

Luke 1:39–45

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

CHOIR "In the Fields near Bethlehem"

REFLECTION

Christmas is just around the corner—only three days left! As we celebrate this Advent season, it's a time of blessings. The greatest blessing we have is the gift of eternal life, made possible by Christ coming into the world. Through His sacrifice on the cross, He paid the price for our sins, allowing us to have fellowship with God. As John 3:16 reminds us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Because of Jesus, we can look forward to spending eternity with God. There can be no greater blessing than that. But as we reflect on the season of Advent, we also see that throughout scripture, there are people who were blessed by God in special ways. Two people who stand out to me in this season are Mary and Elizabeth.

In today's gospel reading from Luke 1, we see these two remarkable women—Elizabeth and Mary. They were separated in age by about thirty years, and though they were blood relatives, their social standing would have been quite different. Elizabeth was the wife of a priest, which gave her some measure of status, while Mary, likely a young peasant girl, had no such privilege. Yet, they both had something in common—a deep faith in God and a willingness to be used by him. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah had longed for a child throughout their marriage but had been unable to conceive. Then, suddenly, God promised that they would have a son. His name would be John, and he would "minister with the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Six months later, Mary received a visit from the angel Gabriel, who told her that she had found favour with God. She would bear a child who would be called "the Son of the Most High." When Mary questioned how this could happen, since she was not yet married, the angel assured her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and the child to be born would be holy, called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). The angel also told her that her relative Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy. At this point, Mary hurriedly went to visit Elizabeth. But why did Mary go with such urgency? It might have been a reflection of her obedience to God's plan revealed through the angel. But we can also imagine that Mary, as a young, perhaps around 15 years of age, unmarried girl pregnant with child, felt a strong need for comfort and understanding. After all, in her day, this would have been a scandal—something that would have likely brought shame and judgment from those around her. So, where might she go to find comfort? She went to her relative Elizabeth, where, instead of judgment, she was met with joy. Elizabeth greeted her with these words: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" What a powerful declaration! What a relief for Mary to hear those words after likely feeling the weight of judgment and shame. It was like cool water on a hot day or a soft chair after being on your feet for hours. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, not only offered Mary acceptance but declared her a blessing,

along with the child she carried. There's a lot happening in this story, but what stands out to me is how much we need more Elizabeths in this world. We need more people who will look past judgment and offer God's blessings instead. People who see God's redeeming work in others, even when the world may not. We need to be those who, like Elizabeth, see others as God sees them and offer them his blessing.

Let me share a story that illustrates the power of offering blessings, no matter the situation: One Sunday after church, a pastor was walking home when he came across a homeless man sitting on a park bench. The man looked up and asked, "Hey, mister, can you spare some change?" The pastor smiled warmly and replied, "I don't have any money on me, but I can offer you something much more valuable: a blessing!" The homeless man looked at him skeptically and said, "A blessing? What's that gonna do for me?" The pastor chuckled and said, "Well, a blessing comes from God, and it's powerful. I bless people all the time, and it can bring joy, peace, and hope." The man thought for a moment and then said, "Well, if a blessing is that good, I'll take one!" So the pastor placed his hand gently on the man's shoulder and said, "May God bless you with warmth and comfort, peace in your heart, and provision in your life. May you find the strength to face whatever comes your way." The homeless man looked up with a smile and said, "You know, I think that was the best thing I've heard all day. But just to make sure, can you also spare some change?" This light-hearted story reflects the theme of blessings and how simple acts of kindness can have a big impact, much like Elizabeth's blessing to Mary. It's a reminder that offering blessings can lift others up, no matter the situation. Whether through words, prayers, or small acts of kindness, we have the power to bless others.

So, in this Advent season, let us be like Elizabeth—people who offer blessings. Let us see others as God sees them, not through the lens of judgment but through the lens of grace and love. As we wait for the coming of Christ, let our hearts overflow with the desire to bless those around us. The Season of Advent is all about being a blessing. Advent brought us the greatest blessing we could ever have: the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN Star-Child Seasons 1-31

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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CHRISTMAS BOWL

OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

All good gifts come from you O God
for you have promised to give us the things we need.
Bless our offerings and these Christmas Bowl gifts,
we pray, that joining with the contribution of others,
they may comfort the needy, help relieve suffering,
and offer hope in your name. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Let us pray for the world.

Let us call to mind the people across the globe
who live in fear of oppression and violence.

Let us pray for women and children
subjected to abuse and assault.

Let us seek inspiration for all who govern and administer the law,
that they may pursue peace, mercy and justice.

(Silence)

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the church.

Let us give thanks for the various expressions of Christ's church.

Let us pray for church leaders and for all ministries undertaken in Jesus' name.

Let us seek blessing upon all people of faith,
that they will be generous ambassadors of God's love.

(Silence)

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For communities.

Let us give thanks for the many communities into which we are called.

Let us pray for those among us who are here seeking solace and support.

Let us seek mercy for those returning to their homelands
and those yearning for reconciliation with enemies and strangers.

(Silence)

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For healing.

Let us remember those who need healing.

Let us pray for those carrying the visible and invisible scars of trauma.

Let us seek peace and relief for all who are suffering.

Let us especially remember today

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.
(Silence)

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Remembering the saints.

Let us rejoice for all the good things we have received
from the people who came before us.

Let us give thanks for the lives of the faithful resting in peace.

Let us pray that the hope of heaven and the joy of resurrection might continue to
transform our lives.

(Silence)

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer. 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

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.

(Refrain)

*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.

(Refrain)

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.

(Refrain)

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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.

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: A Christmas Blessing TiS 779

May the feet of God walk with you,
and God's hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and God's ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and God's breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and God's love bring you home.

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