

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH DECEMBER 7, 2025

Longing for more

GREETING

As our world longs for peace, Isaiah's promise of a just and gentle leader challenges us to act with fairness, bring hope, and prepare the way for God's reign.

CALL TO WORSHIP

God of our waiting,
God of our anticipation,
God of peace,
we await the coming of Christ.
Help us to be aware of your presence—
surrounding, embracing, and inspiring—
in our time of worship together.
Amen.

LIGHT THE CHRIST CANDLE God is here.....God is with us

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

As we gather to wait in anticipation for the coming of peace, joy, love, and hope into our world, let us ground ourselves in the place we find ourselves. In this waiting place, may we be aware of those who have waited and been present here before us.

We pay our respects to the traditional owners of this land, the Biddegai people of the Eora nation, who have lived, worked and played on this country for thousands of years. We bring to mind their elders, past and present, and their place in passing on story and song, language and lore. May we commit ourselves to ongoing peace, joy, love, and hope as we grow in relationship, First and Second Peoples of this land.

SAYING WHO WE ARE

Our vision is to be a loving and caring community, sharing God's love with the world. We are a congregation who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles. We are creating a safe place for community and sharing the journey of life and faith.

SING Light a candle bright and tall tune TiS 314

Light a candle bright and tall
for the Hope within our world.
Hope that heard the ages' call
as the stars and planets whirled.
Shine within our hearts today,
come, O Hope, to us, we pray.

Light a candle bright and tall
for the Peace we wish to know.
Peace on Earth for great and small,
God's Good News to us bestows.
Shine within our hearts today,
come, O Peace, to us, we pray.

Light a candle bright and tall
for the Joy this season brings.
Joy like fountains brimming full.
through our world now let it ring!
Shine within our hearts today,
come, O Joy, to us, we pray.

Light a candle bright and tall
For a Love which knows no end.
Love that comes to one and all.
Fear and hatred to upend.
Shine within our hearts today
Come, O Love, to us, we pray.

Light a candle bright and tall
for the Christ we greet today.
Christ has come, our all in all.
With the angels, let us say:
Shine within our hearts today
come, O Christ, to us, we pray.

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LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES

Last week, we lit the first candle—the candle of hope. Today, we light the second candle, the candle of peace. We light it knowing full well that peace is elusive; in some parts of the world, it is almost completely absent. Yet in this season of Advent, we trust that God is never absent from us. God is always preparing something new. And even where there is discord, whether between countries, within families, or within our own hearts, God is present, gently leading us to new possibilities.

SING: O-So-so Come now O Prince of Peace **REMAIN SEATED**

Come now, O God of hope,
Make us one body,
Come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile your people

Come now, O God of Peace,
Make us one body,
Come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile your people.

Come now, O God of Peace,
Make us one body,
Come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile all nations.

**Loving God, in this time of preparation and planning,
we thank you for the hope and peace you unfailingly offer us.
Show us the creative power of hope.
Teach us the peace that comes from justice.
Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you,
that we may walk in the light of Christ. Amen.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy God,
when our dreams are too small, too limited,
help us to have a wider vision of your reign.

When we choose to stay comfortable and safe,
help us to have a wider vision of your reign.

When we feel like all hope is lost,
help us to have a wider vision of your reign.

When we long for immediate answers and solutions,
help us to have a wider vision of your reign.

WORDS OF GRACE

God of grace,
help us to see and know the hope that already surrounds us.
Make us aware of the grace that is already ours.
Inspire us.
Challenge us.
Move us.
Shake us.
May it be so.
Amen.

PEACE

CHRISTMAS BOWL

Our focus this week is Jordan, a country that hosts large numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, many of whom have lived in exile for years.

This is *Hassan*. After being displaced as a young man, he found himself in Jordan with few opportunities and an uncertain future. Without training or experience, finding work was incredibly difficult.

Through the support of the Christmas Bowl and our long-standing partner — the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees — Hassan joined the Forsa Youth Project. “Forsa” means “opportunity.”

Hassan trained in hotel management and customer service, gaining skills that allowed him to secure employment. He now speaks about the transformation he felt — growing in confidence, gaining independence, and finding hope again. The Forsa program doesn't just offer training. It provides community, mentorship, and a sense of belonging for young people who have lived through displacement and loss.

Hassan's journey reminds us that when young people are given the chance to learn and work, their dignity is restored — and their future expands.

Hassan shared with us: “The Forsa for Youth Project has helped me achieve everything I have today. I can truly say that I'm happy now.”

This is the difference your support makes: purpose, opportunity, and the peace that comes from building a life with dignity.

As we journey through Advent, we remember that every act of kindness and solidarity is part of God's work of peace — and that our support is helping restore hope for families in Jordan and beyond.

SING Not the powerful, not the privileged tune TiS 650

Not the powerful, not the privileged,
not the famous in the land,
but the no-ones and the needy
were the first to hold God's hand.

Not a well-established family
with an heirloom christening shawl,
but a homeless, wandering couple
parented the Lord of All.

Not, at first, to little children,
nor to those whose faith burned bright,
but to adults, stalled in darkness,
angels brought God's love and light.

God, determined to be different
from the standards we think best,
in his choice of friends and family,
lets forgotten folk be blessed.

Not obsessed by our achievements,
worldly wealth or family tree,
may we, in and with God's chosen,
find our fondest pedigree.

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HEWBREW SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 11:1–10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ²The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. ³His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. ⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall

graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

NEW TESTAMENT READING

Matthew 3: 1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" ⁴Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

CHOIR – Christ be our light

REFLECTION

Matthew 3:1–12 and Isaiah 11:1–10

We are in the season of Advent and Christmas. It is the season of remembering and celebrating the Jesus' birth and his coming, and also it is the season of thinking, helping, and taking care of others around us. In this season, we need to look around if there are any people who are in need and help. We gather on this second Sunday of Advent with joyful expectations. We can sense that something wonderful is about to happen. The countdown to Christmas Day is well under way. We can see the excitement in the faces of children who patiently wait for Christmas

Day. It's harder for them to concentrate on their school work when their heads are filled with lots of gifts that they want to receive. Something wonderful is about to take place and we are going to be a part of it. Have you been out to see the Christmas lights yet? Near my home, there is a street called Maders Avenue, and every house is beautifully decorated both inside and outside with amazing Christmas lights. It's just in front of Calvary Hospital. If you have time, you should go and take a look. It's really wonderful. There you can see red, blue, green, and white lights sparkling everywhere. And as you walk along that street, you'll meet all kinds of Christmas characters. There are elves, Santa, his reindeer, snowmen, and—what else? Of course, there is also baby Jesus in the manger, along with Mary and Joseph. You'll find the shepherds, the three wise men, and many animals around them too. It really feels like a beautiful and joyful Christmas scene. But today's Gospel reading for this Second Sunday of Advent doesn't begin with Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. Instead, it begins with John the Baptist. Last week, on my way home after my supervision, I saw several big orange signs on the road—you know, the ones that say, "ROAD WORK AHEAD." Honestly, I think it's the most common sign in Australia. Sometimes I think Australia has only two seasons: summer and roadwork. Everywhere you go, there's always some construction happening. And somehow... it is always happening on the road you need that day. Whenever I see that sign, I usually sigh and say, "Oh no... not again." Because you already know what's coming: slow traffic, one lane closed, detours, and delays. But this week, as I drove past that sign, a thought came to me: "Maybe this is the perfect Advent sign." Because Advent is not only about waiting quietly. Advent is about preparing. And preparing almost always includes some kind of "road work."

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness and shouts, "Prepare the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!" John is not talking about building a physical highway. He is talking about the inner roads—the roads of our hearts, our attitudes, our habits, our relationships, our spiritual lives. And just like the roads around Sydney, the roads inside us also need repairs. Some roads have cracks. Some are crooked. Some are blocked. Some have not been maintained for years. Some of us have roads turning in the wrong direction—toward anger, jealousy, pride, or old hurts. Some of us have blocked roads—unforgiveness, broken friendships, or hurt we keep avoiding. Some roads are bumpy—full of fear, worry, stress, or hidden sadness. And some of us have stopped repairing the road altogether. We tell ourselves, "This is just how I am. Nothing will change." But John the Baptist speaks to that place in us and says, "No—Jesus is coming. So let's prepare the road. Let's clear the path. Let's open the way for him." This is what the Bible calls repentance. But repentance is not about feeling guilty or ashamed. It is not God saying, "Feel bad about yourself." Repentance is simply turning our hearts back toward God—letting him repair what is broken and heal what is hurting. Repentance is like spiritual roadwork. And Advent is the season when God puts a sign inside our hearts that says, "ROAD WORK AHEAD."

Now, sometimes the "road work" we need is not just emotional or personal. Sometimes it's in our spiritual habits—in the parts of our Christian life we don't think about much. This week I came across a little survey online. It wasn't scientific, but it

was funny... and also a bit painful. It said:
10% of church members cannot be seen at all.
20% never attend.
25% never pray.
35% never read the Bible.
40% never invite someone from church into their home—except the minister.
70% never join any church activity except Sunday service.
85% never invite anyone to church.
95% never help someone come to faith.
And 100% expect to go to heaven!

When I first read it, I laughed—but then I thought, “This sounds way too familiar.” This survey isn’t here to judge us. It simply reminds us that sometimes the road we think is fine actually needs repair. Sometimes we assume, “I’m good with God,” even though there are deep cracks on the inside. So Advent invites us not to hide the broken parts, but to open them. Not to pretend the road is smooth, but to let God fix what has been ignored for too long.

But here’s the thing: Preparing the way for Jesus is not only about the inside of our hearts. It’s also about what’s happening outside, in our neighbourhoods, in our city, in the world. Because Jesus doesn’t just come to me. He comes to us. He comes to the poor, the lonely, the hurting, the forgotten, the people who feel like they don’t belong anywhere. If preparing the way for Jesus only makes me comfortable, then I’m not preparing his way—I’m preparing my way. As I was preparing for our Advent Bible Study last Friday, I spent some time thinking about what it must have been like when Jesus came to this world 2,000 years ago. And after a moment, I realized something. Jesus did not come with power to rule over the earth. Instead, he came more like a social justice worker of today—someone who stands with the poor, the weak, and the forgotten. Do you also agree with this? When Jesus came the first time, his arrival was good news especially for people who had no good news. The hungry. The sick. The ones pushed aside by society. The ones who had been told they don’t matter. So Advent—this waiting time—invites us to ask: Who around us needs hope right now? Who has a difficult or hurting life that we can help? Who is walking a hard or lonely road—and how can we walk with them? Maybe it’s a neighbour who lives alone. Maybe it’s someone who’s struggling financially. Maybe it’s a refugee family trying to settle in a new country. Maybe it’s someone in our workplace who acts strong but is quietly breaking. Maybe it’s someone right here in our church. John the Baptist prepared the way by calling people to repentance, which simply means: “Turn around and look where God is leading.” And God always leads us not only into his love but also into love for others. So maybe part of our Advent preparation is to ask Jesus: “Who can I help carry a burden?” “Whose Christmas can I make happier?” “Whose heart can I lift up?” “Where can I show justice, mercy, and kindness?” Sometimes the best way to prepare the way for Jesus

is by preparing the way for someone who’s been pushed aside. Because when we make room in our lives for someone who needs love, we are making room for Jesus himself. This is the heart of social justice—not politics, not ideology, but simply the

way Jesus lived. He fed the hungry. He touched the untouchable. He welcomed the outsider. He defended the weak. He lifted up the ones society ignored. He loved people no one else loved. And if we want to prepare a straight road for him, we walk the same road he walked.

So today, this Second Sunday of Advent, you and I stand in front of a big, bright sign: "ROAD WORK AHEAD." Heart work. Life work. Community work. Let's not avoid it.

Let's not rush past it. Let's let God do the beautiful, painful, healing work that needs to be done. And let's join God in preparing the way—not only in our hearts—but also in our world. Amen.

SING Spirit Song TIS/655

O, let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love;
let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul;
O, let him have the things that hold you
and his Spirit, like a dove,
will descend upon your life and make you whole.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives;
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives.

O come and sing this song with gladness as your hearts are filled with joy;
lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name;
O, give him all your tears and sadness, give Him all your years of pain,
and you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives;
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill our lives.

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OFFERTORY SENTENCE

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Loving God,
we thank you for all the gifts you have given us in life.
We ask that you take these gifts we have given, and our lives,
and use them to bring about your reign of love, joy, and peace
in this world.
Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God, as we look around our world, we see so many places in need of your healing touch.

As Noah sent out a dove to look for signs of hope, we too bring our prayers before you today.

Rest upon us, Spirit of wisdom, Spirit of understanding.
We pray for God's peace to come,
for God's will to be done.

Send out branches of healing and shade
to all those who are unwell at this time.

Send out branches of protection and sustenance
to those going through hard times and worry.

Send out branches of shelter
to all whose lives are precarious and unsafe.

And may we come to be at home together in this peace tree,
whether lion or lamb, bear, infant or snake,
all safe, all belonging,
all delighting in the God who holds everything together. Amen.

SING On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry TIS/270

On Jordan's banks the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
come then and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every heart from sin;
make straight the way for God within;
prepare we in our hearts a home
where such a mighty guest may come.

For you are our salvation, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out your hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth, and let your light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.

To him who left the throne of heaven
to free us all, let praise be given;
and praise be to the Father done,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One.

PD; words: Charles Coffin, Music: William Henry Havergal

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BLESSING

As we leave this place
to continue our waiting for the light,
and longing for more of God's peace,
may the blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.

SENDING OUT SONG 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.

May the waking sun delight you,
and its evening call to prayer.
May the moon and stars surprise you,
spin your heart to worlds unseen.
May the storms with all their wildness
bring you courage, call to strength.
May the darkness be your comfort,
soft preparing for today.

May the trees and flowers greet you,
sing of life that's all around.
May the weeds bring you compassion,
loved by God and his hand.
May the bird-songs tell of freedom,
save you from our foolish chains.
May your heart spill out with loving,
bless the whole wide universe.

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