



The Uniting Church in Australia

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH

**We welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles,
We create a safe place for the community
We share the journey of life and faith.**

21st December 2025 @ 10am

Advent 4 – Love

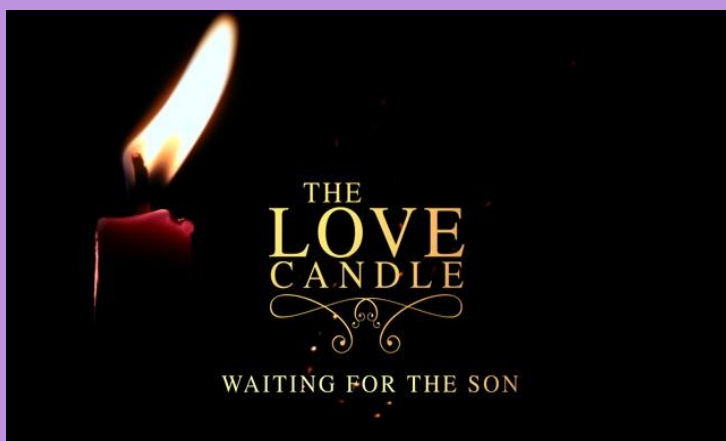
Immanuel: Difficult to Conceive

Leader Robert

Reflection Deok Hee

Isaiah 7:10–16; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19; Romans 1:1–7.

Matthew 1:18–25



For details and information about our church activities and The Kogarah Storehouse, check out the websites: kogarah.uca.org.au and <https://www.kogarahstorehouse.org.au/>

**For pastoral concerns, please contact Deok Hee on
0401 975 745.**

Scriptures from the Revised Common Lectionary

Isaiah 7:10–16

Isaiah prophesies that God will give a sign to the House of David. This sign will be a virgin—young woman—giving birth to a son and naming him Immanuel.

Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

A psalm pleading for God's restoration and God's face to shine upon the people that they may be saved. The psalmist asks how long God's anger will smoulder.

Romans 1:1–7

The beginning of the letter to the Romans introduces Paul and his faith in Jesus Christ. The writer emphasises the importance of ministry among the Gentiles.

Matthew 1:18–25

An angel appears to Joseph, telling him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, even though she is pregnant. Joseph remains faithful to Mary and, after the birth of the child, names him Jesus.

Theme Focus

On this last Sunday of waiting, we are comforted by Isaiah's sign and Matthew's promise of Immanuel—God with us—and become more aware of God's presence with us.

Word for the Day

It is important to understand the context of the passage we read from Isaiah today.

Being in the early part of Isaiah, this passage was written in a time of great turmoil in the Middle East (some things never change). The conflict referred to in Isaiah 7 is the Syro-Ephramite War of 734 BCE. Israel (or Ephraim) had united forces against Judah. King Ahaz of Judah was considering appealing to Assyria, the power force of the day, for help against Israel and Syria. In response, God assures that they will not overcome Judah. And how will they know? In response God will give them a sign. A young woman will conceive and give birth to a son, whom she will call Immanuel.

Before we assume this refers to Jesus, we need to read ahead a little to Isaiah 8, where Isaiah and the prophetess conceive and bear a child. His name is not Immanuel, but Maher- Shalal-Hash-Baz. A few verses later, however, the land in which they live is named Immanuel. All this happens before the child can utter the words, 'This is my mother and this is my father.'

This is a story about how to deal with fear, distress and disappointment in life. Our natural instinct when faced with fear is to fight back. King Ahaz took it upon himself to join forces with Assyria and fight against their oppressors. At the time of Jesus' birth, things were not too different. Under Roman occupation, the people were living in fear and distress. What was the answer? To live as oppressed people or to fight back?

Matthew knew that his listeners would be familiar with the stories from the war days, and so he uses the same pattern to speak to them in the first century. Judah was living in a time of fear, and so are we. God told Judah to be patient and wait for a child to be born. Matthew tells his listeners to be patient and wait for the birth of a child. This child, Immanuel, whether born in 734BCE or 2000 years ago, is a sign of hope and peace.

We don't know much about what became of Isaiah's son, but we certainly know about Jesus. He lived and breathed love, peace, and compassion. How did he react in the face of fear? With love. How did he respond when he was threatened? With compassion. How did he reach out to those who were different to him? With peace.

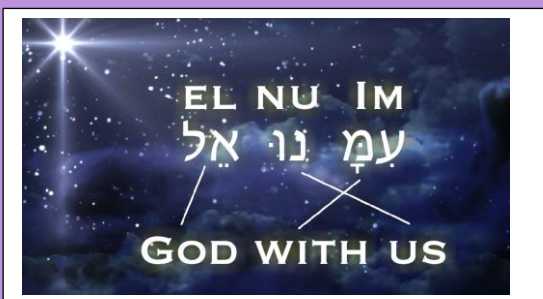
When we hear of people in need and reach out in compassion, Immanuel is born into the world. When we feel threatened by people who are different and open our arms wide in welcome, Immanuel is born into the world. When we learn to live with what we need and share our excess with those in need, Immanuel is born into the world. When anger burns within us and we choose to react with peace, Immanuel is born into the world.

Ideas for Reflection

- Where will Immanuel appear in the lives of the 21st century? In us?
- Is it so difficult to conceive that we might be Immanuel in this community and in this world? This is precisely what the incarnation is about, us being Christ's body, the hands and feet of God.

If it is difficult to fathom, let us remember what the word Immanuel means. With us is God. We do not share this love, joy and peace out of our own strength; it is God with us that gives us the words and the actions. It is God who acts within us.

- How does this change being Immanuel in the world?



25 December 2025

Christmas Day

Dawn of Peace

Leader Deok Hee

Reflection Deok Hee

Holy Communion Deok Hee

Isaiah 9:2–7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11–14; Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)

Our service will be one of Readings and Carols

Scriptures

Isaiah 9:2–7

Jesus' followers chose titles we find here to describe their experience; seeing in Jesus the fulfilment of such promises Holy One makes through the prophets.

Psalm 96

Sing a new song with Holy One: sing joy, sing liberation, sing hope. All creation is invited into the sacred song.

Titus 2:11–14

The Holy One comes among us, changing our lives. Those aligned with the way of Christ are encouraged to be fully aligned with Christ, enacting integrity born in love.

Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)

Moved by governors and angels, Joseph and Mary of Nazareth bring a new life into the world in the faraway town of Bethlehem, and shepherds, too, journey into town to bear witness. Listen. Look. Feel the shimmer in the air as this story is told anew.

Theme Focus

We celebrate peace born among us; may it grow within and between us all.

Ideas for Reflection

- **Our Prince, our Lord, the one to whom we give our allegiance. Do we wholeheartedly run with the shepherds in the gospel story?**

- **What happens when we return to the every day?**

In Titus 2:11–14, followers of Jesus are encouraged to be wholehearted every day: fully aligned with the way of Christ, the way of Holy One—the way of Peace.



From **Common Grace Advent devotionals** - Deni Harden reflects on the Advent call to action - to shine God's love, light and hope across every boundary, nation and heart.

A Light for All People

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

*'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name';*

and again he says,

'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people';

and again,

*'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him';*

and again Isaiah says,

*'The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.'*

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:4-13

As we come to the end of another year, I have to admit - I'm feeling pretty worn out. Everywhere I look, the news is heavy: disasters reshaping whole communities, wars forcing people from their homes, and deep divisions pulling us

apart. I find myself longing for some steadiness, for peace...and some days it's hard to catch even the smallest glimpse of hope. That's why I'm grateful for Advent. It reminds me that God's love broke through this darkness in the most unexpected way - not with fanfare or force, but as a baby born in Bethlehem.

Romans 15 reminds us that this love was never meant for one group alone. Paul writes of a Messiah who came as a servant to the Jewish people, confirming God's promises, and at the same time opening wide the doors of mercy to the Gentiles. Through Christ, every division - ethnic, cultural, or social - is met with grace. The fractured find belonging. The wounded find healing. Hope itself takes on flesh and dwells among us.

Our faith, Paul says, is sustained by endurance and the encouragement of Scripture so that we "might have hope." This hope is not naive optimism; it is a revolutionary trust that God's love continues to break through despair, injustice, and fear. It is the love that refuses to yield to darkness, that insists on renewal even in desolation. Through the Spirit's power, this love grows within us until we, too, overflow with hope.

Today, that same love calls us to embody its light. To see the refugee not as a burden but a neighbour. To stand with those facing racism and exclusion. To work for reconciliation in a divided world. It means recognising how our patterns of consumption and indifference harm not just the planet, but the people most vulnerable to its changes. This is the justice of Advent - a love that takes action, that crosses boundaries, that invites every nation and every heart into God's unfolding story. This is a love that breaks through our divisions and differences.

Advent reminds us that love is not silent. It breaks through in hospital rooms, protest marches, dinner tables, classrooms, when we join our voices with those crying out for justice, and quiet acts of mercy. It whispers into fear: you are not forgotten. And it proclaims to the world: the God of hope is still at work.

May this season fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you too may overflow with hope - and become a light for all people.

Deni Harden lives with her husband Matt on Gundangurra Country in the Southern Highlands of NSW. A Kindergarten teacher at a local village school passionate about environmental care and justice, Deni is also involved in Kairos Outside Ministry supporting women impacted by imprisonment, and in Common Grace's Knit for Climate Action. She loves bush walks, long cuppas, and time with family and friends.

Big Things Afoot in 2026

What is happening with the process towards the new Presbytery?

You may be aware that in 2026 four presbyteries will merge to become the Southern Presbytery. The following outlines the steps currently in train. This summary comes from Steve Aynsley.

- The Transition Commission has been established which will oversee the change process.
- The Transition Commission consists of:
 - a Chair (Sharon Flynn),
 - one full-time rep from each of the new presbyteries (Amy Junor - Southern Presbytery, Rev. Graham Perry - Northern, Rev. Ann Perrin - Central); and
 - two volunteer reps from each presbytery, including Barbara Moore from Southern Presbytery. The second volunteer rep is to be under 30 and Southern Presbytery has been unable to identify anyone willing and able as yet.
- It is hoped the legal arrangements for the new entities (Presbyteries) will be in place from 1 July 2026, and this will be a time of celebration, but that other transition arrangements will continue.
- The Transition Commission has its first full meeting on 5 December 2025 and is presently focusing on forming admin support, shaping the resource fund (which will fund the new presbyteries), establishing IT infrastructure, and reviewing legal requirements.
- Communication and updates will be a priority going forward.
- In Southern Presbytery, all the Standing Committees from the current 4 presbyteries (Georges River, Illawarra, Canberra Region and Riverina) have combined as a Joint Standing committee in order to oversee the nomination process of the Transition Commission positions, and to make procedural decisions.
- Committees and 'work areas' such as PRC, Property and administration have had meetings to understand our differences across the 4 current presbyteries and explore optimum ways of working together.

The day after the Atrocity ... (from Jamberoo Abbey)

This morning our hearts and the hearts of all Australians are heavy with the news of the shocking terrorist attack on our Jewish community in Bondi last night. As a community, we stand with our Jewish sisters and brothers who are devastated and deeply grieving, and we wrap them round with our love, support and prayer. May our God who is always with us give rest to those who have died, console families who have lost loved ones and bring healing and strength to the injured and afraid.

We also pray for all first responders who were heroic under such trying circumstances and the many people who are traumatised by the events they witnessed. We pray too for our leaders, our police officers and security personnel in days ahead as they endeavour to bring unity and calm to our country, as well as uncover important details to ensure that safety is restored.

Yesterday in so many of our churches, we lit the rose coloured candle on our Advent wreaths to symbolise our joy as we await the coming of Emmanuel very soon. Our Jewish sisters and brothers also gathered yesterday in Bondi and throughout Australia and the world to light the first candles of Hanukkah and to sing and dance together. By nightfall, our joy had turned to sadness, our lights snuffed out by darkness.

Today, in shock and deep sorrow, as Australians and people of faith of every kind, we join as one; we stand together; we pray and we commit fiercely once more to life, to beauty, to love, to joy, to peace, to hope. And we light our candles again on menorahs and wreaths, in homes and churches, synagogues and mosques to remind us that light will always triumph over darkness, courage will overcome fear, life will rise up from death.

May God bless our Jewish communities today and hold them close. May God bless our beautiful land and we her people. Amen.

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the cultural context of the research. It highlights the need for researchers to be sensitive to the values and beliefs of the communities they are studying. This is particularly important in the field of education, where cultural differences can significantly impact learning outcomes.

The second part of the paper focuses on the methodology used in the study. It describes the process of selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the results. The authors emphasize the importance of using a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The third part of the paper presents the findings of the study. It discusses the results of the quantitative data analysis and the insights gained from the qualitative interviews. The authors conclude that there are significant cultural differences in the way that students learn and that these differences should be taken into account when designing educational programs.

Finally, the paper offers some practical recommendations for educators and researchers. It suggests that teachers should be encouraged to use culturally responsive teaching practices that take into account the diverse backgrounds of their students. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to continue to explore the cultural factors that influence learning outcomes.

Planning Ahead

- **December 21st Advent 4 Love**
- **December 25th Christmas Day @ 10am (Thursday) (There will be no Christmas Eve service this year.)**
- **January 4th 2026 We celebrate Epiphany**
- **January 8th 2026 Kogarah Church Council @ 4pm in person at Kogarah UC to discuss Life and Witness report suggestions**

Please pray for ...

The mission and ministry of our congregation and for our Minister, Deok Hee, and Wynne Cheng as they make links to the Chinese community.

Worship leaders; helpers, leaders, followers The Kogarah Storehouse and its many clients; Lala and staff and volunteers at the Storehouse. Dorothy and Godfrey and the work of LACLA. The team, parents and children in the Early Learning Centre.

Those who are sick, sad or lonely: We pray especially today for Dennis and Robyn Lyons, Rhonda Chamberlain and family; Prema and Priya, Denis and Dolly, Ngahua, Peter and Sue; Dinah; Ern Edwards; Jim Bird, Cindy, Dorothy and Godfrey, - For others whom we name in our hearts.

Pray for the people of Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Ukraine, Russia, Israel and Palestine, especially the people of Gaza and Lebanon. The USA and the countries of Europe. Sudan. The people of South-East Asia, especially Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia plus Sri Lanka in this time of devastating floods. Those recovering from the catastrophic apartment fires in Hong Kong.

Next Sunday

28th December 2025 @ 10am

**Christmas 1
Between Celebration and Precarity**

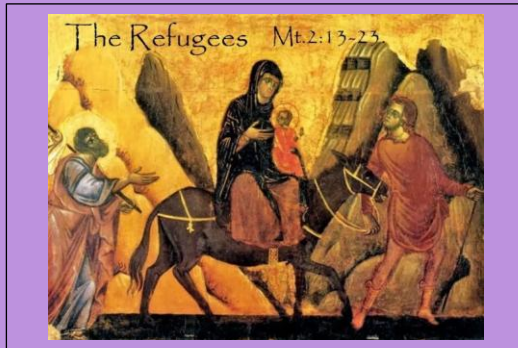
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Holy Communion Deok Hee

Isaiah 63:7–9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10–18.

Matthew 2:13–23



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