

Kogarah Uniting Church

21 December 2025 @ 10:30am

Advent 4 - Love

Immanuel: Difficult to Conceive

Acknowledgement of Country

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 (*Name/s*) people/s, 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.

We light the Christ Candle and the first three Advent Candles

God is here!

God is always here!

God is with us!

God is always with us!

We say 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 the community and sharing the journey of life and faith.

Introduction to Theme

This week's readings speak of the promise of a child born in what seem like impossible circumstances. Immanuel—God with us—may sound like something that belonged only to Jesus long ago. Yet we are invited to wonder how we might bear God's presence in the world, as God works

through our hands, our hearts, and our feet to show love, compassion, peace, and joy.

Call to Worship

God of our waiting,
God of our anticipation,
God of love,
we await the coming of the Christ.

Help us to be aware of your presence—
surrounding, embracing, and inspiring—
in our time of worship together.
Amen.

Sing: Come O Come Emmanuel

<https://youtu.be/iO7ySn-Swwc?si=eTsFmDHeP6XbNIZx>

**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 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 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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Lighting the Advent Candles

We have lit three candles—for hope, for peace, and for joy. Today we light the fourth candle—the candle of love. With this flame, we signify the love of God that surrounds and fills us at all times, but that we recognise in a special way in the Christmas story. There is no greater power than love. It is stronger than rulers and empires, stronger than grief or despair, stronger even than death. We love, because God loves us.

Four candles are lit.

Sing O-so-so - Come now O Prince of Peace

<https://youtu.be/JmV6xIQE0xc?si=NTbr7FLS7X-mjlpT>

**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 all nations**

**Come now, O God of joy,
make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile your people.**

**Come now O God of Joy
make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus,
reconcile all nations.**

**Come now, O God of love,
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 all nations.**

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Prayer In unison

Loving God,

we open ourselves to you this Christmas season.

As these candles are lit, light our lives with your imagination.

Show us the creative power of hope.
Teach us the peace that comes from justice.
Fill us with the kind of joy that cannot be contained but must be shared.
Magnify your love within us.
Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you,
that we may walk in the light of Christ. Amen.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/agape-love/>

Prayer of Brokenness

God of grace,
for the times when we limit your compassion and grace
to the boundaries of our human imagination,
Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

For the times when we feel your life and hope
are impossibly distant and unreachable,
Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy.

For the times when we forget the breadth and depth of your love
and judge others with human eyes and hearts,
Lord have mercy,

Lord have mercy.

Words of Grace

God is with us, Immanuel.

God's love and grace
are before us, behind us,
within us and around us.

We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Pass the Peace of Christ

ENGAGING THE WORD

Readings From the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 7:10–16

¹⁰Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹²But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. ¹³Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

¹⁷The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.”

Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19

¹Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

²before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might,
and come to save us!

³Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

⁴O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your
people's prayers?

⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.

⁶You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

¹⁷But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.

¹⁸Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

We sing this song to remind us of the joy and love that awaits us all this coming Wednesday when we celebrate the birth of Christ. It speaks also to our situation in recent days.

Sing: Marty Haugen

<https://youtu.be/28AvhFwyWAI?si=7aM1Fuai9Y-8WeS->

**1 Awake! Awake and greet the new morn,
for angels herald its dawning.
sing out your joy, for Jesus is born,
behold! the Child of our longing.
Come as a baby weak and poor,
to bring all hearts together,
to open wide the heavenly door,
and lives now inside us forever.**

**2 To us, to all in sorrow and fear,
Emmanuel comes a-singing,
whose humble song is quiet and near,
yet fills the earth with its ringing.
Music to heal the broken soul
and hymns of loving kindness,
the thunder of the anthems roll
to shatter all hate and injustice.**

**3 In deepest night Christ's coming shall be,
when all the world is despairing,
as morning light so quiet and free,
so warm and gentle and caring.**

**One without voice breaks forth in song,
a lame one leaps in wonder,
the weak are raised above the strong,
and weapons are broken asunder.**

**4 Rejoice, rejoice, take heart in the night,
though cold the winter and cheerless,
the rising sun shall crown you with light,
be strong and loving and fearless;
Love be our song and love our prayer,
and love, our endless story,
may God fill every day we share,
and bring us at last into glory.**

From the Christian Scriptures

Romans 1:1–7

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:18–25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah* took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²²All this took place to

fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:
²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',
which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep,
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his
wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a
son;* and he named him Jesus.

Offering

Offering 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, hope and peace
in this world.**

Amen.

Sing:

***We are all one and our goal this Christmas is to work to bring in
God's kingdom through the birth of Jesus Christ. This song is full
of hope for the future.***

**Sing: We cannot own the sunlit sky / Abundant life (Ruth Duck)
*Tune: I cannot keep from singing".***

**We cannot own the sunlit sky,
the moon, the wild flowers growing,
For we are part of all that is
within life's river flowing.
With open hands receive and share
the gifts of God's creation,
That all may have abundant life
in every earthly nation.**

**When bodies shiver in the night
and weary wait for morning,
When children have no bread but tears,
and war horns sound their warning.
God calls humanity to awake,
to join in common labour,
That all may have abundant life,
and oneness with their neighbour.**

- **God calls humanity to join**
- **as partners in creating**
a future free from want and fear,
- **Life's goodness celebrating,**
that new world beckons from afar,
- **Invites our shared endeavour**
that all might have abundant life
and peace endure forever.

Ruth Duck

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https://youtu.be/LknAVM4dYNo?si=iChguUjNBn_cdyAW

Reflection

Isaiah 7:10-16, Matthew 1:18-25

For the last three weeks, we have been talking about hope, peace, and joy—the gifts God gives us through Jesus Christ. Today, we come to the fourth Sunday of Advent. This is the Sunday we call the Sunday of Love. In the Bible readings we heard today, we are reminded of God's love for us. Long ago, through the prophet Isaiah, God made a promise. He promised that a virgin would have a child. This child would be called Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us." God promised that this child would come to save and care for his people. The Gospel reading tells us how this promise came true. It came true through Mary's child, Jesus. And it also tells us about Joseph. Joseph loved God. He trusted God's word. So when the angel spoke to him, Joseph listened. He took Mary as his wife, and he did what God asked him to do. Because of Joseph's quiet obedience, Jesus was given a home and a family. And through this simple, faithful act, Emmanuel—God with us—came to live among us.

Today as we await the birth of Jesus, God's gift of love to us, I want to share with you a familiar story or fable, slightly rewritten for this season, and then make a few comments about what love is really like. Once upon a time, there was a fisherman and his wife. They lived in a small, simple house. It had two rooms, a tiny garden, and a well. Every day, the fisherman went out in his small boat. In the evening, he came home with his catch—sometimes a lot of fish, sometimes only a few. This was how they lived. But the fisherman's wife

was not happy. She said, “Why do I have to live in this old, small house? Is it too much to ask for a proper home—with running water, electricity, and a real kitchen? I wish I were a lady.” She complained again and again, and this made the fisherman very sad. One day, something strange happened. The fisherman caught a beautiful fish. To his surprise, the fish spoke to him. “Please throw me back into the sea,” the fish said, “and I will give you whatever you wish.” The fisherman thought for a moment and said, “Alright. I wish my wife were a lady, living in a proper house with water, electricity, and a kitchen.” That evening, when he came home, his wish had come true. They now lived in a nice house, and his wife was very happy. But after some time, she began to complain again. “Is this really the best we can do?” she said. “I want something better than this small house. I want to be a Duchess, very rich and important woman—with a big house, servants, and a beautiful carriage. Why did you ask for so little?” So the fisherman went back to the sea and called the fish again. Once more, the fish agreed. But even as a Duchess, the woman was not satisfied. Before long, she complained again. “I want to be a queen,” she said. “Go back to the fish.” And once again, the fisherman obeyed. Life in the palace was full of comfort and luxury. But even as a queen, she was still not happy. Finally, she said, “What I really want is to be God. I’m sure the fish will understand. This is what I wanted all along.” The fisherman went back to the sea one last time. When he returned, there was no palace. There was no big house. There was not even their old little home. Instead, he heard a baby crying. He followed the sound and found a cave in the rocks. Inside were two oxen and a donkey. And in a manger lay a small baby, crying. And the woman had truly become God. The fisherman’s wife had her wish. The problem was not that she wanted too much. The problem was that she did not understand who God is, and what God’s love is like.

In our story, the fisherman’s wife forgot something very important. She forgot what God is really like, coming into this world as a human. She forgot about Christmas and Passion Week. She forgot about the manger and the cross. She forgot that God is a God who comes to be with his people—especially with the poorest and the most humble. It is so easy to forget what it cost Jesus to come to earth as one of us. The Almighty God, the Creator and King of the whole universe, gave up his heavenly throne. He gave up being worshipped by angels and saints, just to come to us and share his life with us. This is the love of Christmas. God put aside his throne and became one of us, like us in every way. And as one of us, he humbled himself even more and gave his life for us. When we hear this incredible and beautiful news, there is only one way to respond: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one another, just as he loves us. Last week, we all heard about the tragedy at Bondi. Many people were hurt, and families were shaken. We heard about the man who took the gun away from one of the

attackers to protect others. Nearby, a couple in a car tried to help as well, and sadly, both lost their lives. Their actions remind us that love is not just a feeling—it often means sacrificing ourselves for others. This is the same kind of love Jesus showed. Jesus came into this world to be with us, to share in our struggles, and to bring hope and care into the lives of people. In the face of pain and fear, we are called to care for one another and to act with love, being God's hands and heart in this world.

My friends in Christ, love is the most important part of the Christmas story. It is God's love that gives us hope, peace, and joy. And it is our love for one another, in Jesus' name, that makes Christmas truly meaningful. As you finish getting ready for Christmas—just a week away—let's hear the words of the Apostle Paul about love in a fresh way. Someone wrote a modern version of 1 Corinthians 13, which goes like this: If I decorate my house perfectly with ribbons, twinkling lights, and shiny decorations, but do not show love to my family, I am just another decorator. If I work hard in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing fancy meals, and setting a beautiful table, but do not show love to my family, I am just another cook. If I give my time and money to the soup kitchen, sing at the nursing home, and give all I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it does not really matter. Love stops the cooking to hug a child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss your spouse.

Love is kind, even when tired and busy. Love does not shout at the kids to get out of the way. Love does not only give to those who can give back, but rejoices in giving to those who cannot. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. Video games will break. Pearl necklaces will be lost. Golf clubs will rust. But the gift of love will last. Yes, the gift of love will last. That is what Christmas is all about. The gift of love.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ has come to be with you in your life. He was born as one of us so that we can always relate to him. He never leaves you. He never abandons you. He never criticizes you. He accepts you as you are. He loves you as you are—and because of his love, he never leaves you as you are. He saves you just as you are. And don't forget, he is always with us. He is Emmanuel—God with us. In every part of our life—even when we are afraid, lonely, or sad—we can hold on to the great Christmas promise. This is the Good News of our Christian faith. This is the gospel. This is the good news we are called to share with others, especially in this Christmas season. God is with us. Love came down at Christmas. Amen.

Announcements

THE CHRISTMAS BOWL IN PAKISTAN In the dry, drought-affected district of Umerkot, in southern Pakistan, life has long been a struggle, especially for girls. Many families have been forced to move in search of water and work, and most children have missed out on school altogether. With livelihoods disrupted by drought, education often takes a back seat to survival - yet it is education that offers families a pathway to greater stability and hope for the future. Recognising this, our local partner Community World Service Asia (CWSA) is helping communities rebuild not just their livelihoods, but their futures, through access to education.

“Due to the lack of a school, I used to think that maybe I would never be able to study,” says ten year-old Anaya*. “And when I saw other girls going to school, I would think to myself, ‘I wish I could also study and go to school like these girls.’” Through the Christmas Bowl, and our local partner CWSA, that dream is becoming a reality for Anaya and many other girls in her community. CWSA runs awareness campaigns that help parents understand the importance of education for all children, not just boys. These efforts are shifting mindsets and opening doors that were once firmly closed.

“Before the CWSA program, parents focused more on boys’ education, while girls were kept away from education. However, after the mobilisation efforts, both boys and girls have been given equal opportunities to a large extent.”

Anaya’s joy in learning is unmistakable. “I enjoy studying at school, and I have many friends there,” she says. “Our teacher is female, and I really like her. English is my favourite subject.” For Anaya, education is more than a personal dream, it’s a way to serve others and inspire change. “I want to become a doctor, serve my parents, and help people,” she says. Thanks to the Christmas Bowl, Anaya is not just learning, she’s leading. And through her example, a new generation of girls in Umerkot is discovering that with faith, courage, and opportunity, change truly is possible.

“When my daughter began attending school, other girls started their education too,” says her mother, Sunia*. As we reflect on the theme of love, may we remember that every gift, every act of kindness, every prayer for peace, is part of that greater story - the

love that began in Bethlehem and continues through us today.

***Names changed for safety reasons.**

Prayers of the People

Loving God,
often, when we look at the world around us
with all its beauty and colour,
it can be easy to see only the grey and the gloom.
*We bring before you, O God,
the people and the situations in need of your love.*

God of life and love,
hear our prayers for your earth,
your world,
and your people.
*May we bring colour and life to those we are able,
so that your light may shine in the lives of others.
Amen.*

Remembering how God chose a humble young woman and a carpenter to provide the nurture for Christ Jesus, let us seek the special blessing of God upon the ordinary Christians who serve unnoticed and often unappreciated in the community.

Let us continue to pray.

Responses: **L:** Be with them, God of Jesus.

P: *Be with them, Emmanuel.*

Christian carpenters and other skilled workers who day by day ply their trades with skill and integrity to the glory of God;

Reliable citizens in service organisations, local government, school committees, little athletics, St John's Ambulance, SES, and the rural fire service.

Christian police officers, street cleaners, teachers, gardeners, social workers, parking attendants, nurses, shop assistants.

Single parents who are always on call, providing physical and spiritual nurture and lovingly attending to a thousand small details every day.

The ordinary believers in our own families whom we often take for granted, and steadfast Christian friends who are always there when we need them.

The quiet achievers in our congregations, who though unheralded, express their faith in numerous practical ways.

Ordinary pastors and priests of no remarkable gifts or fame, who lovingly and faithfully tend the flock of Christ.

God of grace, we pray for these, and a host like them, who constantly leaven this world with goodness and mercy, yet ask for nothing except the knowledge that they do Christ's will.

Help us, loving God, to learn the way of Christ from one another, and in your hands may our very ordinariness become a witness to your glory in Emmanuel.. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Prayer after the Atrocity at Bondi

God of mercy and peace,
we come to you with hearts that are tired and grieving.
We entrust to you the lives lost,
the wounded,
and all who are holding sorrow this day.
Surround the Jewish community and all who have been affected
with comfort, safety, and hope.
Strengthen those who serve and protect,
and grant wisdom and gentleness to all who lead and respond.
In a world shaken by violence,
teach us again the way of Christ —
the way of love, courage, and peace.
Hold us, heal us, and lead us forward.
Amen.

— Rev Charissa Suli, President, Uniting Church in Australia

*Sing We are reminded in this song that the whole world celebrates
the coming of the Christ child and that for us in the Southern
hemisphere we experience things somewhat differently...*

"Carol our Christmas" (Tune: Reversi)

9 AA

<https://youtu.be/CQu9OsbqfRM?si=MI48AT0aYiEuyJ4p>

Carol our Christmas,
an upside down Christmas;
snow is not falling and
trees are not bare.
Carol the summer, and
welcome the Christ Child,
warm in our sunshine and
sweetness of air.

Sing of the gold and the
green and the sparkle,
water and river and lure
of the beach.
Sing in the happiness
of open spaces,
sing a nativity summer
can reach!

Shepherds and musterers

move over hillsides,
finding, not angels,
but sheep to be shorn;
wise ones make journeys
whatever the season,
searching for signs of the
truth to be born.

Right side up Christmas belongs
to the universe,
made in the moment
a woman gives birth;
hope is the Jesus gift,
love is the offering,
everywhere, anywhere,
here on the earth. (Shirley Erena Murray)

SENDING OUT

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

As we leave, may we embrace the challenges
of our lives and our world...
Leave here with the certainty that God
loves you and travels with you.
*All Relax in God's love,
and love in openness to God's spirit moving within you.*

Go to live as God's people:
*All as God's eyes, God's heart and God's hands,
in the name of Christ. Amen*

Words of Blessing

**May the blessing of God,
sower of seed,
nurturer of hope, and
gardener of harmony,
stay with us today, tomorrow, and always.
All Amen!**

Exit Song: Christmas Blessing © A W Podlich/R Mann (Sing 2x)
<https://youtu.be/7ODuo4aIA8?si=UNQ1enbDKhRcUh7h>

**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.**