



Candlelight Service for Christmas Eve

9pm, 24th December 2018

Introduction

A single candle, the Christ Candle, is lit.

Seven unlit candles on front table, with a taper. Seven plinths/stands are in place around the church sanctuary. A tea light candle is handed out at the door to everyone. If it is possible, house lights are raised a fraction each time a candle is lit (so by the end the sanctuary is in bright lights). Alternatively, seven standing lamps can be placed around the church and turned on each time a candle is lit.

We begin with silence as the darkness of the night begins to surround us.

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that”. (*Martin Luther King Jr*)

“It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness” (*ancient Chinese proverb*)

“All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.” (*St. Francis Of Assisi*)

On this Christmas Eve, we welcome you from near and far, to this sacred space. We acknowledge the Kaurna people, the first inhabitants of this place. We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather tonight. As we gather, let us hold in our hearts and minds, our sense of God, “the Spirit of Love”. May the Spirit of Love be in and around each one of us as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

This service is a variation on a service of light - the opposite of a *tenebrae* service. *Tenebrae* is the Latin word for shadows. Candles will be lit during the service. It's a symbolic way of representing the struggle between darkness and light, between despair and hope.

In the beginning, Light shines in the darkness,
giving birth to all creation,
the centre, the heart, of unfolding life.
The Light graces all creation as God's presence.
The Light is Christ. The Light is Love.
The Light is a Jewish mystic, sage, and prophet.
The Light is Beautiful. The Light is Good.
The Light is life in the midst of death.

Gathering

This is the night we re-tell the story of the light that sparked to life that night long ago. The story tells itself to those who will listen. The light shows itself to those who will see. May the story awaken your sense of wonder and worship, as Christ, the Light, reveals the wisdom and wonder of God's boundless love. Tonight, the light of the world shines anew. It is full of possibility - to change us, to help us find hope, joy, peace and love. Welcome the light that will burst through whatever darkness there is. Come, light of God, come.

Song: Vigil for Christmas Eve - choir *(words: Helen Wiltshire)*

Readings: The words of the prophet Isaiah

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him." Isaiah 64:4

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

The first candle is lit from the Christ candle, and then placed on a plinth

This Christmas Eve, may we open our eyes to the luminous moments that come bearing the grace and love of Christ our Light. May we receive illumination enough for this step, this breath, this moment. May our hearts be quietened, that we may know the peace and fullness of this holy time.

May the Light of the World be our comfort and strength.

Shine, O Light, in the darkness of our world.

Sing, O angels, in the stillness of our hearts,

"Glory to God in the highest, and, on earth, peace among those whom God favours."

Song: O come Emmanuel *(please stand for the singing if you are able)*

O come, O come **Immanuel**

The waiting night is **dark** and still

We search the desert's **timeless** sky

For signs of holy **mystery**

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Immanuel shall come to us

A star shall be the sign.

O come, O come, the **time** is near

We yearn to know your **presence** here

Creation stirs: the **time** is full

Be born to us, **Immanuel**

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Immanuel shall come to us

A child shall be the sign.

O come, O come **Immanuel**
In pain of birth our **work** reveal
To share the struggle to be born
In all whose lives are desolate and torn
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Immanuel shall come to us
And love shall be the sign.

O come, O come **Immanuel**
The source of dreaming, now our dreams fulfil
Let peace descend like gentle rain
And justice flood the **earth** again
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Immanuel shall come to us
And hope shall be the sign. *Words: Neil Quintrell*

Reading: In the beginning

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1-2, 4-5

If we lean too quickly toward the light, we miss seeing one of the greatest gifts this season has to offer us: that the deepest darkness is the place where God comes to us. In the womb, in the night, in the dreaming; when we are lost, when our world has come undone, when we cannot see the next step on the path; in all the darkness that attends our life, whether hopeful darkness or horrendous, God meets us. God's first priority is not to do away with the dark but to be present to us in it. Isaiah 45:3 says, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places. For the Christ who was born two millennia ago, for the Christ who seeks to be born in us this day, the darkness is where incarnation begins. Can we imagine the darkness as a place where God meets us - and not only meets us, but asks to take form in this world through us?

A second candle is lit and placed on a second plinth. (House lights go up one notch)

How the Light Comes

I cannot tell you how the light comes.
What I know is that it is more ancient than imagining.
That it travels across an astounding expanse to reach us.
That it loves searching out what is hidden, what is lost, what is forgotten
or in peril or in pain.
That it has a fondness for the body, for finding its way toward flesh,
for tracing the edges of form,
for shining forth through the eye, the hand, the heart.
I cannot tell you how the light comes, but that it does. That it will.
That it works its way into the deepest dark that enfolds you,
though it may seem long ages in coming
or arrive in a shape you did not foresee.
And so may we this day turn ourselves toward it.
May we lift our faces to let it find us.
May we bend our bodies to follow the arc it makes.
May we open and open more, and open still to the blessed light that comes.

(Jan Richardson, Circle of Grace)

Readings: Anticipation and Preparation

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. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But 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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." *Matthew 1:18-25*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. *Luke 2:1-5*

A third candle is lit and placed on a third plinth (House lights go up one notch)

Song: Turning point of time *please remain seated*
(solo, verse 1)

The stillness of anticipation
cradles tiny Bethlehem;
silent now in preparation
for the miracle of birth.
All creation, hushed, expectant,
waits a baby's cry;
born in all simplicity
at the turning point of time.

(please join in the singing)
Be silent, earth, before the myst'ry
of the long-awaited birth.
All the hopes of human hist'ry –
longings, yearnings, dreams, desires –
gathered in a single moment ,
focused in a child;
born in all simplicity
at the turning point of time.

A nascent star, in celebration,
blazes over Bethlehem;
crucible of all creation,
where the human and divine
are refined in simple beauty
in the new-born child;
born in all simplicity
at the turning point of time. (Words: Neil Quintrell Music: Douglas Simper)

Reading: The birth of Jesus

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:6-7

Into the still and silent night
Breaks the cry of labour pains:
New life demands a sacrifice.
Into the still and silent night,
Bursts emotions unleashed at last:
New life releases a father's delight, relief and wonder.
Into the still and silent night
Peals a scream of shock and yearning:
New life tests its voice, seeks the safety of loving arms.
Into the still and silent night
Flashes bright light and joyful singing:
New life is announced by angels of God's Glory.
Into this still and silent night
Unfolds the story often told
Of new life unfurling,
Again, and again, and again.

(Source: Seasons: Fusion)

Song: This Christmas

This Christmas may we celebrate
each baby born in simple state:
a country town, a shearing shed
soft fleece to make a baby's bed.

This Christmas may we see once more
each baby born beyond our shore,
on Ashmore Islands or Nauru -
these are Australia's children too!

This Christmas may we vigil keep
for children who in hunger sleep,
in countries torn apart by war
where powerful foes their cries ignore.

This Christmas may we seek to know
the baby born so long ago,
who grew in wisdom day by day
and chose to live Love's costly way.

This Christmas may we celebrate
such love has greater power than hate;
and as we strive 'til wars shall cease
each child may share Love's way of peace.

(Words: Helen Wiltshire; Music: Praetorius, Piae Cantiones 1582)

Prayer for the children

The Divine entered our story in a helpless, vulnerable child to remind us to look for the divinity in every child. The child who grew to be a man would say, "Let the children come to me, and do not let anything stand in the way of children knowing their belovedness, and knowing the Love from which they can never be separated."

We remember the children born into the care of families, and the global village. They are all our children. We pray for the children of our world, whom God knows by name and whom God loves with depths greater than we can possibly imagine. We pray for those who live in the midst of despair, that they may nonetheless find glimpses of comfort, hope and joy sufficient to nurture their wounded hearts. We pray for parents struggling to survive, and for those living with the trauma of war and conflict, famine, poverty, persecution, flight, and detention. For pray for those who are anxious for the welfare and future of their children, rendered helpless by the situation in which they find themselves. Grant them courage to face the day, and the ability to draw deeply of the reservoirs of resilience they need to keep on being good parents. *(Prayer adapted from A Just Cause)*

A silence is kept. A fourth candle is lit and placed on a fourth plinth. (House lights go up one notch)

Reading: Jesus' Birth is Announced to the Shepherds

Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"

When the angels had left them, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. Luke 2:9-18

A fifth candle is lit and placed on a plinth. (House lights go up one notch)

Song: Hark the Herald Angels Sing *(words: Helen Wiltshire)*
(during the singing, the offering will be collected)

Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful all ye nations rise
join the triumph of the skies
with th'angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem
Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King.

Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord
See him born when time was best
to a woman God called Blessed
Through the flesh true Godhead see
Hail th'incarnate Deity
Pleased as one with us to dwell
Jesus our Emmanuel
Hark the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King.

Hail the heav'n born Prince of Peace
Hail the Sun of Righteousness
Light and life to all he brings
Ris'n with healing in his wings
Mild he lays his glory by
Born that we no more may die
Born to raise all folk on earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King.

Offering prayer

God of great wonders, we join with you in the joy of this season of giving. You give us life and breath, you fill the world with beauty, our hands with bounty, and our hearts with the desire to give. Accept these gifts, and ourselves in service always, in every season. Amen.

A sixth candle is lit and placed on a plinth. (House lights go up one notch)

Reflection

Prayers of the people

In gratitude, in praise, may our hearts turn to receive the Light of the Luminous Night.
Guide us in the ways of laying our lives gratefully before You.

We lift our voices to God:

May the Wisdom of Christ light our path.

You call us each by name.

Teach us to serve all creatures of your sacred creation.

Guide us toward unity, healing our division.

We lift our voices to God:

May the Wisdom of Christ light our path.

Song: 'For the troubles of the world' (choir only)

For the troubles and the sufferings of the world,

God, we call upon your mercy:

the whole creation's labouring in pain!

Refrain:

We pray for peace,

*the blessed peace that comes from making justice,
to cover and embrace us.*

Have mercy, Lord.

A sixth candle is lit and placed on a plinth. (House lights go up one notch)

May all leaders know they are called to care;
may they heed your peoples' cries
for release from senseless oppression.
Guide us toward justice and peace, healing our deceit.

We lift our voices to God:

May the Wisdom of Christ light our path.

We are yours.

Guide our hearts and minds and bodies in the ways of wisdom,
that we might hear and heed the pleas of friends among us
who hunger, thirst, and face the cold nights.

Guide us toward mercy, healing our fear.

We lift our voices to God:

May the Wisdom of Christ light our path.

Strengthen all who suffer, and those who care for them.

Open our hearts to see your tender Presence already within us.

Guide us toward wholeness, healing our blindness.

We lift our voices to God:

May the Wisdom of Christ light our path.

You welcome all who have completed their earthly journey.

Your peace is now their peace.

Guide us into your Heart, healing our soul.

We lift our voices to God:

May the Wisdom of Christ light our path.

Song: For the troubles of the world
(Please remain seated as we sing this prayer for the world)

For the troubles and the sufferings of the world,
God, we call upon your mercy:
the whole creation's labouring in pain!

Refrain:

*We pray for peace,
the blessed peace that comes from making justice,
to cover and embrace us.
Have mercy, Lord.*

Lend an ear to the rising cry for help
from oppressed and hopeless people.
Come! Hasten your salvation, healing love!

Refrain:

*We pray for power,
the power that will sustain your people's witness:
until your Kingdom come,
Kyrie eleison!*

Words and Music: Rodolfo Gaede Neto

You are invited people to come and light tea light candles at one of the stations with the lit candles as you offer your own prayers in silence. (7 plinths are placed around the church with a lit candle on each one)

In gratitude and praise, we invite your peace into our lives. *A silence is kept*

We lift our voices to God:

May the Wisdom of Christ light our path.

Rejoice! For God is with us - Emmanuel.

In the darkness of our world shines God's holy light.

Now there is reason to hope, to love, to laugh, to live.

Emmanuel - God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God!

Song: The Hope we call Immanuel *(Helen Wiltshire)*

When fears take flight and darkness dies
and people walk 'neath sunlit skies,
when kindness binds each broken heart
then love will life anew impart
*O sing of hope, gift for all,
whate'er befall, the hope we call Immanuel.*

When ploughs are forged from swords and shields
and silence falls on battlefields,
when justice heals a war-torn land,
then hope for peace is near at hand.
*O sing of hope, gift for all,
whate'er befall, the hope we call Immanuel.*

When eagles rise on wings of gold
and children see their dreams unfold,
when mountains sing and trees rejoice
then hope is born with joyful voice.
*O sing of hope, gift for all,
whate'er befall, the hope we call Immanuel.*

When wisdom shapes the world we share
and loving weaves a web of care,
when wonder sets the sky ablaze,
then hope is born to bless our days.
*O sing of hope, gift for all,
whate'er befall, the hope we call Immanuel.* (Words: Helen Wiltshire. Music: English traditional)

Benediction *(based on Isaiah 9:2-7)*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in deepest night, are lit up with a brilliant sight.
Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.
The spread of his influence and of his peace will never end.
May the light of the life of Christ be kindled in us,
And lead us to the shining truth,
of God with us, God for us, God in us.
Therefore, go out into the world with great joy,
and the grace of Bethlehem's matchless Child,

the love of the God who never ceases to amaze,
and the fellowship of the Spirit who never wearies,
will be with you this holy night and evermore.

Thanks be to God! *(Source: Bruce Prewer, adapted)*

Congregational Hymn: "O Come all ye Faithful??
(You are invited to stand as we sing)

Oh, come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant!
Come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him
Born the king of angels:
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

See how the shepherds,
summoned to the cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh with holy fear:
We too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

Child, for us sinners
poor and in the manger
we would embrace you
with love and awe;
who would not love you,
loving us so dearly?
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God
In the highest:
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

(Composer: John F. Wade, words slightly adapted)