

ORDER OF SERVICE FOR CHRISTMAS DAY 2020. SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH AND SHEPPARTON RURAL CONGREGATIONS

Call to Worship:

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. (Luke 2: 10 – 11)

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those he favours! (Luke 2: 14)

Hymn: 304 (TiS) 'O come all ye faithful' – vv. 1, 2, 3, 4, & 7.

Lighting of the Advent candle:

(Reader) After counting the weeks of Advent we have come to Christmas Day. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in the land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9: 2)

(The four coloured candles are lit first then the white candle and reading continues).

(Reader) The true light which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (John 1: 9) And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1: 14)

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Gracious God, we give you thanks and praise for Jesus Christ our Lord: for he was the Word before all creation. Through him all things come to be; not one thing has its being but through him.

Jesus light of the world,

We worship and adore you.

To God our creator, born as one of us, be all praise and glory. With all the company of heaven, we worship, saying:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, who was and is, and is to come; to him be glory and honour for ever and ever. Amen.

As we worship with the shepherds before the newborn Christ-child, we open our hearts in penitence and faith.

Merciful God, we are sorry for the things we do and say and think which make you sad, and for not thinking of others before ourselves. Please forgive us and help us to love you and other people more and more.

Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:

Your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Doxology: 761 (TiS) 'Holy, holy, holy Lord'.

Readings: Isaiah 52: 7 – 10, Luke 2: 1 – 14.

Hymn: 306 (TiS) 'Christians awake, salute the happy morn'. Vv. 1, 2, 5, 6.

Message: 'The birth of HOPE'

The birth of Jesus Christ the Son God brings hope. Hope that we can neither imagine nor anticipate.

It was hope that connects both Mary and Elizabeth. Hope that formed a deep abiding bond between the two women.

Hope is founded on love. The affection between the two women made the baby in Elizabeth's womb jump for joy at the greeting by Mary.

It is that hope that changed everything for both Elizabeth and Mary.

It changed Elizabeth's shame to a song of joy, it changed Mary's fear to possibly, for the first time, to sing out her praise and joy and confidence in God.

According to the gospel of Luke, it was love that turned Mary's fear into hope. It was love that changed how Mary felt, it washed away her fears, it built up her hope.

This hope, the hope of Mary and the hope of Elizabeth cannot be found on external things. For hope on external things does not change circumstances.

That is why it makes sense that this hope, the hope of Mary and Elizabeth is found only in love. It is in relationship that our feelings change, and circumstances may not change but that hope shifts the way we feel about them.

It is when we are grounded in love and compassion that our horizons shift and our view of the world changes.

It is easy to think that we can find hope on external things. If only we can have enough money, we can be at peace. It is to think that we can go looking for it or even generate it. Somehow, if we try hard enough, we'll be able to conjure up hope by our own effort.

The story of Mary and Elizabeth reminds us that we don't find hope, hope finds us.

Hope comes to us when we least expect it. It rises up in even the darkest and most despairing places and times and we find that it is love that causes it to happen.

When we forget ourselves sufficiently to care deeply for those around us, when we reach with compassion beyond our own needs, anxieties and concerns, hope is born.

This hope is not a thin inward-looking hope for us but a hope for the whole of creation. The creation that God made and loved so much to send his only Son to redeem and reclaim it for our sake.

In reaching out beyond ourselves to care for the whole of creation, hope is not only found, it grows.

Love and hope are profoundly intertwined. Jesus, the newborn child, hope of the world, in whom we have faith impel us to love, and as we love, hope is built.

Hymn: 303 (TiS) 'Hark! The herald angels sing'.

Notices & Concerns:

Prayers of the People:

Christ, born in a stable, give courage to all who are homeless. Jesus Saviour,

hear our prayer.

Christ, for whom the angels sang, give the song of the kingdom to all who weep. Jesus, Saviour,

hear our prayer.

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds, give peace on earth to all who are oppressed. Jesus, Saviour,

hear our prayer.

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt, give humility and wisdom to all who govern. Jesus, Saviour,

hear our prayer.

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly manger, give the glory of your resurrection to all who rest in you. Jesus, Saviour,

hear our prayer. Amen.

Hymn: 309 (TiS) 'Angels, from the realms of glory'.

Blessing:

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph and Mary, and the peace of the Christ – child be ours this Christmas Day and always. **Amen.**