



Order of Service
19th December 2021

Opening hymn: TiS 305 Let earth and heaven combine

Call to Worship: *(from Luke 1)*

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Let us worship God!

Acknowledgement of First Peoples

We respectfully acknowledge that we gather on Bangerang country of the Yorta Yorta nations.
We honour the custodians of the lands and waterways; and pay our respects to their elders - past,
present and emerging.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (Love):

*And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of God...
for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.*
(The candles of hope, peace and joy are lit)

We light the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of love.
(the candle is lit)

Jesus, light of our world, we hope for change in our own lives and in your world.
We watch and work and wait together for love. Amen.

HYMN TiS 217 Love divine, all loves excelling

OPENING PRAYER

O God,
you broke down the barriers when you crept in beside us.
In Jesus, your hands touched all, and touched us.
You opened our eyes to see how the hands of the rich were empty,
and the hearts of the poor were full.
You took the widow's mite and the child's loaves
and used them to show us the Kingdom.

Here in the company of the neighbour whom we know
and the stranger in our midst,
and the self from whom we turn,
we ask to love as Jesus loved.

Make this the place and time, good Lord,
when heaven and earth become one,
and we in word and flesh
know ourselves beloved. Amen.



Responsive Psalm 80 A Prayer for Israel's Restoration

¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,

you who lead Joseph like a flock!

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

² before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.

Stir up your might,

and come to save us!

³ Restore us, O God;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

⁴ O LORD God of hosts,

how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears,

and given them tears to drink in full measure.

⁶ You make us the scorn^[a] of our neighbours;

our enemies laugh among themselves.

⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

In a few days' time we will be celebrating the birth of Christ, so let us restore our souls, and refresh our spirits.

**Restore us, O God, let your face shine
that we may be saved. Amen.**

Though we are complicit in the frenzy of consumerism, the unreality of expectations, the tension of gift giving, and the pressure to attend gatherings:

**Restore us, O God, let your face shine
that we may be saved. Amen.**

Though we would like to be more Christ-centred in our daily lives, we know we can turn to God, and be restored. So, we ask:

**Restore us, O God, let your face shine
that we may be saved. Amen.**

AN EARLY WORD – Christmas Bowl story

HYMN TiS 316 O little town of Bethlehem

BIBLE READINGS:

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 1:39-55



REFLECTION

Singing is something we have all missed during our various lockdowns over the last 2 years. COVID took away one of our sources of joy and healing, the therapy of singing, and it's so good to have it back again. We could always sing along to the radio or a music track or in the shower, but there's something special about singing together. Songs speak to us and through us, and there are many songs that move and inspire us. Some come from movies or musicals – written by people like Andrew Lloyd Webber or Rogers and Hammerstein. Others come from the hymn book and are written by Charles Wesley or Isaac Watts. Some songs make us laugh, some make us cry, but few arouse the passion for justice through the words that are uttered by a young pregnant woman in ancient Palestine. Today, as four candles are lit, the Song of Mary soars through the Gospel reading and into our hearts again, as it does every year.

Mary, the unwed mother, the fiancé of a poor carpenter. Mary, who knows depths of desperation that many of us will never have to know. Mary, who felt herself powerless – it was she who sang to God about the salvation of the whole world.

We often think of Mary as gentle and meek, but today, Mary is brave and bold, singing loud and strong. Everything — the very shape of human history — is about to change. The new dawn is on the way, and Mary sings out to greet it. The weight lessens; hope is born.

Mary doesn't initially greet the news of her pregnancy with a soaring song and blazing hope. When Luke's Gospel first introduces us to Mary, she is more like the traditional image of Mary - young, meek, seemingly timid, but ultimately faithful. When the angel tells her the news, she consents, but she's not singing yet. As she's absorbing the news from the angel Gabriel that she will conceive and bear a child, he tells her, perhaps to console her: Elizabeth, your relative, is pregnant too, even in her old age! Gabriel doesn't actually tell Mary to go to Elizabeth, but Luke says she still "made haste" to go to the Judean town in the hill country to see her.

Mary wants to be near someone who understands. Elizabeth is also pregnant by a miracle. Elizabeth, Mary knows, won't think she's crazy. And here, with another human being who understands that God works in really weird and unexpected and direct ways, Mary is able to find the courage to sing her song of hope. Not ordinary optimism, but great hope. The kind that catches fire. The kind that sings loud.

Today, Mary sings as she invites us into the vulnerable territory of daring to hope. There is much about which to be pessimistic, what with Covid in all its variants, and brooding elections, and concern about climate change, and looming shortages of essential goods. But hope - the big, world-shaking, musical hope of Mary - looks ahead, knowing that we cannot imagine what God is able to do. The world is broken, violent, and divided, and we are desperate to fix it, but we cannot do that by ourselves. Our one spark of hope is that God has spoken and told us that someday, all things - from our personal struggles to the weight of the world's pain, shall be made right. That hope is why Mary sings.

Today, the Gospel story invites us, like Mary, to seek out others in order to find our song of hope. It wasn't until Mary was with Elizabeth in the Judean hills that her hope burst into song. And maybe, whether we know it or not, that's what we're doing here today too as we worship together. We have made haste to seek one another out, to gather together so that we, too, can sing songs of hope.

Our song is one of extraordinary hope. Hope that has seen the broken and divided state of the world and knows that it cannot afford to hope too small because we cannot repair the world on our own. Only God can, and only God will. In the meantime, we are called to make our corner of the world that God so loves a less divided, more trustworthy, more hopeful place. We are called to sing.

The best part about Mary's song of hope is that it is never hope unfulfilled. Every year, we remember her bold song to remind ourselves that God has already broken through. Even in the darkness, even in the deepest disappointments, even when we are betrayed, and even when the world looks most broken, we keep this crazy hope alive that God has and God will break through. And today, we make haste to find each other to sing that hope again, to fan that spark into flame again.



Let us pray:
Our souls magnify the Lord,
and our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour,
for he looks with favour upon us
and sees our unrealized potential.

In the tradition of Mary,
and all who have said “yes” to God,
we are here today,
to add our assent to theirs.

Like Mary, we feel overwhelmed;
we wonder if we are worthy,
or capable, of following the calling.
Like Mary, we have our questions
and we will not be afraid to ask them.
Like Mary, we will hear and ponder
the assurance that God will empower us.
Like Mary we will strive to say -
“Let it be with us according to your will.”

To whatever God is inviting us
at this time in our lives,
and relying on God’s grace, we say “yes.”

Song My soul proclaims the Lord my God (Mary’s Song) - to the tune of Amazing Grace

My soul proclaims the Lord, my God.
My spirit sings his praise.
He looks on me, he lifts me up,
And gladness fills my days.

All nations now will share my joy;
His gifts he has outpoured.
His little one he has made great.
I magnify the Lord.

His mercy is for evermore,
His name I praise again.
His strong right arm puts down the proud
and raises lowly man.

He fills the hungry with good things;
The rich he sends away.
The promise made to Abraham
is filled to endless day.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEDICATION OF OFFERING

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Into our troubles and weaknesses,
Into the barren places of our souls, Come Lord,
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into the war torn and the refugee,
Into those who live in conflict, Come Lord,

Into the homeless and the unemployed,
Into those who feel abandoned, Come Lord,

Into the sick and the disabled,
Into those with Covid and with cancer, Come, Lord
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into the poor and the starving,
Into those who are oppressed or abused, Come Lord

Into the lives of loved ones,
Into those from whom we are estranged, Come Lord,

Into our joys and celebrations,
Into our work and our achievements, Come, Lord
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Lord Jesus we long for your coming. Hasten that day when those who seek you in every nation will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south and sit at table in your Kingdom. Hasten the day when your Kingdom will come in all its glory, and suffering and pain and sickness and oppression and death will be overcome forever. Hasten the day when we will be resurrected as a great multicultural family and live in hope, peace, joy and love together in your kingdom.

We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, saying:
*. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.*

HYMN TiS 315 Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord

Blessing

Mary sang as if God had already completed the change for which she hoped.
**Let us go from here to live with such hope and love that our eyes are opened to
God's transforming presence in our world.**

Let us go to prepare the way of Christ.
And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, go with us,
and remain with us always,

Amen

