

The Service of the Lord's Day

Saint Margaret's Uniting Church

Sunday 9th December 2018 - Advent 2

Leader: Rev Dr Barry Brown Reader: Dorothy Gordon

We Gather to Worship God

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE WURUNDJERI PEOPLE

WE STAND AS THE BIBLE IS CARRIED IN TO WORSHIP

INTROIT Prepare ye the way of the Lord... (in parts)

GREETING, WELCOME and CALL TO WORSHIP

WE SING "*God has spoken by his prophets...*" TiS 158

1

God has spoken by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging word,
each, from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
In the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holds us fast:
God is king, his throne eternal,
God the first, and God the last.

2

God has spoken by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one;
spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time began,
Light from Light, to earth descending,
God, revealed as Son of Man.

3

God is speaking by his Spirit,
speaking to our hearts again,

in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then,
through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith yet standing fast;
God still speaks, his word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.

PRAYERS OF ADORATION and CONFESSION

WORD'S DECLARING GOD'S FORGIVING GRACE

We Listen to God's Word:

AN EARLY WORD AND PRAYER WITH THE CHILDREN

WE LIGHT THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE and SING

*'Christmas is coming'
the Church is glad to sing
and let the Advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.*

1

The first is for God's promise
to put the wrong things right,
and bring to earth's darkness
the hope of love and light.

2

The second for the prophets,
who said that Christ would come
with good news for many
and angry words for some.

The Baptism of Raphael Astbury

SCRIPTURE SENTENCES –

THE GOSPEL according to Saint Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 16 to 20 - Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on

earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

APOSTLE'S CREED (The people stand as they are able)

Do you believe in God, who made you and loves you?

***I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.***

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, your Saviour and Lord?

***I believe in Jesus Christ,
God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.***

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,
and the continuing work of our salvation?

***I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.***

WE SING “Loving Spirit, loving Spirit”

TiS 417

1

*Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be -
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.*

2

Like a mother you enfold me,

*hold my life within your own,
feed me with your very body,
form me of your flesh and bone.*

3

*Like a father you protect me,
teach me the discerning eye,
hoist me up upon your shoulder,
let me see the world from high.*

4

*Friend and lover, in your closeness
I am known and held and blessed:
in your promise is my comfort,
in your presence I may rest.*

5

*Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be --
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.*

PRESENTATION OF THE FAMILY and GODPARENTS

THE PARENTS' REQUEST, RENUNCIATION and AFFIRMATION

PRAYER OVER THE WATER and THE BAPTISM

WE SING THE ANCIENT AARONIC BLESSING [Num 6:24 – 26]

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

THE RESPONSES: The Parents, then the Congregation:

***With God's help,
we will live out our Baptism
as a loving community in Christ:
nurturing one another in faith,
upholding one another in prayer,
and encouraging one another in service.***

WE WELCOME RAPHAEL INTO THE CHURCH AS HE IS TAKEN AMONG THE CONGREGATION, SINGING:

Father welcomes all his children..." TIS 491

*Father welcomes all his children
to his family through his Son;
Father giving his salvation,
life for ever has been won.*

1 Little children, come to me,
for my kingdom is of these;
life and love I have to give,
mercy for your sin.

2 In the water, in the word
in his promise, be assured:
those who are baptized and believe
shall be born again.

3 Let us daily die to sin,
let us daily rise with him,
walk in the love of Christ our Lord,
live in the peace of God.

PRESENTATION: [Candle, Certificate, Children's Bible, Dove]

A PRAYER FOR RAPHAEL, his parents and for all the families who are part of our Church community.

Amen

[The Children leave for their Activities]

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD:

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

The Book of the prophet, Isaiah, Chapter 9, Verses 2 to7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named
Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

THE GOSPEL according to Saint Luke, Chapter 1, Verses 26 to 38 *The Birth of Jesus announced*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

THE CHOIR SINGS— *'Christmas Time is Near'*

Tell the story once again of Jesus and his birth
angels in the starry sky, songs of peace on earth,
Tell how the baby was laid in the hay,
There on that first Christmas Day.
'Cos Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near
Time of peace

Tell me how the shepherds heard the crowd of angels sing,
how they ran to Bethlehem to find the new born King.
Tell how they knelt there in wonder and awe
and ran to tell us what they saw.
'Cos Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near
Time of hope

Tell me how the baby Jesus grew to be a man,
how he lived and how he died, living out God's plan.
Tell how he loves me and still lives today,
walking beside me each day.
'Cos Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near,
Christmastime is near
Time of joy.

Time of peace,
Time of hope,
Time of joy.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD – *Prophetic Poetry*

[The following is a manuscript version of the sermon by Rev Dr Barry Brown, 9th December 2018]

Introduction

I have found there are two things that annoy some worshippers at this time of year: First, that ministers do not choose Christmas carols for this pre-Christmas period. Rather, they stubbornly choose Advent hymns. You might be pleased to learn that because Sunday December 23rd is so close to Christmas, and as we will not be having a service here on Christmas Eve, we shall have some carols that day. Second, some folk get a bit annoyed when the minister chooses to include Bible readings other than those prescribed in the Lectionary. I am guilty of this today. I have selected two variant readings (from those prescribed elsewhere in the Advent-Christmas season). I am doing this because we are following the themes in a hymn being used as part of our Advent Candle litany. Today's theme is 'The Prophets' and that is the theme to which we now turn.

During the Advent – Christmas seasons, if you attended all services until the Second Sunday of Christmas (Epiphany - January 6th), you will have heard readings from seven (7) different prophetic voices – each from a particular historical context; yet each chosen to reflect the sense of fulfillment in the coming of Jesus the Christ.

The Hebrew Prophets

A few comments about the Hebrew Prophets might be useful. Some consider that Moses was the first 'prophet' as he had been called by God to speak for God to the Hebrew people. Moses lived about 1,300 – 1,400 years BCE. There were several notable prophets, such as Samuel and Elijah, who lived and worked as prophets prior to the establishment of the first Israelite monarchy around 1,000 BCE.

However, the more established prophets who have books named in their honour, mainly come from the period of around 500 years, 750 – 250 BCE. These are mostly from just **Before, During** and **After The Exile** (during the 6th Century BCE - 587-539). Of those listed for reading during the

following weeks are three *Minor* prophets **Zephaniah & Micah** from before the Exile, and **Malachi** who lived and worked during the Persian period that ended the Exile – the beginning of the Return.

Last week we had a reading from one of the *Major* prophets, **Jeremiah**; who ministered to the Hebrew people for nearly four decades from the beginning of the Exile. Today, and over the Christmas period, we will have several readings from the *Major Book of Isaiah*.

The Book of Isaiah serves to illustrate how most of the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) came to us. It is essentially a collection of sayings, oracles, hymns and poems. Or, more particularly, it is a collection of collections that were collated sometime after the Return from Exile, and are to be read as an integrated whole. The Book of Isaiah reflect prophetic words addressed to Hebrew people over a period of more than 200 years.

Jewish and Christian scholars are able to detect the prophetic voice of Isaiah of Jerusalem who lived in Royal Jerusalem prior to the Exile – from around 742 BCE. Today's reading come from this section of Isaiah. The rest of the material is collected in honour of Isaiah and bears his name (much like the Book of Psalms is named after King David). Considerable sections of the Book of Isaiah, however, clearly originate from the period of the Exile. These probably include chapters 34 – 35 and 40 – 55, the latter chapters being those that Jesus identified himself with (eg *The Servant of God who suffers*). It is customary, mainly for literary purposes, to refer to these chapters as being from Isaiah of Babylon. A third collection is sometimes attributed to Isaiah of the Return (or Third Isaiah) and includes chapters 24 – 27 and 56 – 66. These reflect something of the pessimism of the returnees, and the prophet's mission to provide a sense of confidence and hope – "*Arise, shine, for your light has come...*" Those leading worship on Christmas Day have the choice of three passages. Each reading comes from one of the three voices of the Book of Isaiah.

Note carefully – almost all the readings we use are 'Poetry'

I draw your attention to the fact that the bulk of passages found in the Book of Isaiah, and others that we are very familiar with at this time of the year, consist of *poetry*. They are not prose, narrative or direct speech, but poetic speech full of metaphors and prophetic re-imagining. They are intended to reach the heart and soul of the hearers and to point them to new understanding, new hope and new possibilities not of their own making. They are words hope and promise. Listen to the words of my favourite Old Testament scholar (slightly altered):

Walter Brueggemann - *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*

It was the particular vocation of Isaiah of Babylon to construct poetic scenarios of alternative reality outside the control of the Babylonian empire. These fresh alternatives liberated Jewish exiles to think differently, speak differently, and sing differently. In the end the Babylonian definitions of reality lost their power and authority because this poetry...

The poetry does not describe what was happening. Rather it evokes images and invites perceptions in Israel that were not available apart from this poetry. The poetry is not aimed first of all at external conduct, as though the poet expected people immediately to start packing for travel. Rather the poetry cuts underneath behaviour to begin to transform the self-image, communal image, and an image of possibility...

During 2018 many have remembered life, ministry and death of a modern-day prophet – Martin Luther King Jr. Dr King was assassinated the day that our daughter Debra was born, April 4th 1968. I would like you to hear extracts from two of his speeches; one from 1963, and one from the night before his death.

Note the poetry, the echo of the Hebrew prophets, the appeal, the metaphors, the words of encouragement and hope:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

And an extracts from his last speech, 3 April 1968:

I've been up the mountain... And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. (Yet) I'm not fearing any man. "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord..."

Prophecy as Fulfillment (as distinct from Prediction)

The prophetic voices of Scripture are seldom 'predictions,' but forth-telling and proclamation; and a clarion call for hope, obedience and trust in the purposes and promises of God. We read passages from the Hebrew prophets, not to explain how predictive prophecy came true, but to celebrate that in Jesus' birth – indeed in his life, death and resurrection, we see God's promises being fulfilled.

Back in 1981 I had an unexpected, extended stopover in Boston, thanks to the then President, Ronald Reagan and the US air-controllers' strike. One day I found myself sitting on a bench outside Trinity Church Boston. Exploring the surrounds I found that for many years the minister there was Phillips Brooks (1835 – 93), the composer of the Christmas Carol '*O little town of Bethlehem*'. I invite you to listen carefully the first verse, especially the last two sentences:

*O Little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see you lie!
Above the deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by:
yet in your dark streets shining
the everlasting light,
**the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in you tonight.***

I suggest that when we read passages from the Hebrew Prophets during the Advent and Christmas services, we are not claiming that their predictions have come true (most times their words are better understood in their original historical contexts). Rather, we are declaring that in the coming of Jesus the Christ, we are able to sing aloud: ***"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight."***

Close:

I close by referring to today's Gospel reading, Luke 1:26 – 38. I chose this reading in part because while it forms an important part of the birth Narrative in Luke, it is not set for reading during Advent of Christmas. Rather, it is reserved for use on March 25th next year – a Monday. It is read (in some churches as a Feast Day) as the Annunciation – the announcement.

In this passage we hear about Mary receiving 'the surprise of her life', being told that she, a young single teenage girl, was to bear a son – the Son of the Most High.

We know from other parts of Mary's story that she was a deeply devoted young woman and had been taught to dream of, and anticipate, the fulfillment of the promises of God. She was absolutely surprised, taken back. But, upon reflection, Mary was not in doubt.

Mary had learned, as we must learn, that God keeps promise – but not always in the ways we expect or imagine.

Our God is a God of Promise, of Fulfillment, and of Surprise!

Be Prepared !

We Respond to God's Word:

THE OFFERING, PRAYER and our 'JOURNEY SONG'

Prayer:

Loving God - we continually seek your strength and comfort. You often free us from our unfounded fears, and provide us with wonderful examples of your love. In response, we offer these gifts, along with ourselves. We pray that each will help provide something, that touches people with your extraordinary love. This we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

SING – TIS 342 (verse 4)

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small:
love so amazing, so divine
demands my soul, my life, my all.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE and THE LORD'S PRAYER English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC)

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 for ever.

THE CHILDREN 'SHOW & TELL'

The Sending Forth of The People Of God

WORDS OF MISSION, BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

WE SING "*Come, thou long-expected Jesus...*" TiS 272

1

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,

born to set thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

2 |

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

3

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us for ever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

4

By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

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