

BENDIGO SOUTH UNITING CHURCH CLUSTER

Christmas Day Service – 2020

Acknowledgement of Country:

Welcome:

Call to Worship:

In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God:

light of life for all the people.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God:

full of grace and truth.

The word became flesh and lived among us,
giving us the power to become children of God.

Glory be to God, the God of the ages of ages.

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Christ Candle:

The light of Christ has come into the world. God overcomes our darkness.

Thank you God, for the gift of light!

Loving God, guide our feet to the stable
that in faith we would kneel at the manger in Bethlehem.

**Thank you for the gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love
that are ours this day. Amen**

HYMN: TIS 268

**Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
let earth receive its king;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

**Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns;
let us our songs employ;
while fields and streams, rock, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

*Isaac Watts 1674-1748 alt based on Psalm 98
Adapted from W. Holford's "Voce di Melodia c.1834 by Lowell Mason 1792 – 1872*

Prayer of Adoration and Confession:

Assurance:

HYMN: TIS 309

Angels, from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
herald's of creation's story,
now proclaim Messiah's birth:
*come and worship Christ, the new-born King,
come and worship,
worship Christ, the new-born King.*

Shepherds, in the fields abiding,
watching over flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
yonder shines the infant light:
*come and worship Christ, the new-born King,
come and worship
worship Christ, the new-born King.*

Wise men, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great desire of nations,
you have seen his natal star:
*come and worship Christ, the new-born King,
come and worship
worship Christ, the new-born King.*

Though an infant now we view him,
He shall fill his Father's throne,
gather all the nations to him:
every knee shall then bow down
*come and worship Christ, the new-born King,
come and worship
worship Christ, the new-born King.*

*James Montgomery 1771-1854 alt,
Arrangement from the Oxford Book of Carols by permission Oxford University Press*

Bible Readings:

Titus 3:4-7

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Luke 2:8-20

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, 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.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

MESSAGE: Luke 2:8-20

During this year our three churches received a grant for signs to be placed outside each church. The Cluster Council deliberated over the form these would take, and the wording to be placed on them. During quite a lot of this time our state was in full or partial lockdown, which made the process more complicated. People in the community may have considered it a strange time to be putting up signs announcing what happens in each congregation. As we know, the churches were unable to open for services, or for outreach or group activities, for most of the year. I hadn't given the signs too much thought, but in actual fact, on reflection, I think it was a real act of faith and witness: our God is still with us; this terrible time will pass; we will still be here telling God's message, serving and involving the community in different ways.

As we look at the church signs we see that they are fairly modest, but have all the information necessary. They are not gigantic billboards, forcing themselves on people's vision with fluorescent colours, blocking off the sight of the church itself, the most important part of the message.

The sign the angel spoke of to the shepherds was a sign of things to come. God's Son, the long-awaited Messiah, was a baby, and what's more, a baby born in very humble circumstances. Through the ages God's signs to the people of the time had often been similarly simple. For instance, a dove bringing back a branch from a tree as a sign to Noah that the flood was abating; a still small voice on the mountain after the wind, the earthquake and the fire – God was not in any of these for Elijah, but in the still small voice.

This sign, the baby lying in a manger, was evidence that God was not sending God's Son to the wealthy, in their palaces and mansions, and not as a warrior to overthrow the Roman Empire. God's Son was coming to show the people what his Father was really all about: a God of justice wanting to bring about a fairer society, acting in love, teaching about mercy and forgiveness, bringing healing to those in need of physical or emotional healing.

The shepherds represented the ones this baby was to grow up and serve. If the baby had come to be born in the palace they would not have gone to see him, knowing that they were outcasts in that society, not seen as having an honourable occupation, often regarded as thieves. As their occupation kept them from attending religious services they were not even accepted by the temple – they were sinners! They would not have been permitted to get anywhere near a new born royal king. I wonder if they understood, as they looked at that precious new born baby, that he had come to minister to them, that they were acceptable and welcome in God's sight.

There are signs of God's presence with us in the world today, in many different places, and each of us sees different signs, and sees them differently. Many find the signs of God's presence in their gardens, or in the natural world, even in the sky at night or at sunset. Others may see the signs in people, others in certain circumstances of life. It might even be at the birth of a baby, to a friend or a family member, when we are privileged to see and rejoice in that miracle of new life.

We may all experience one or more of these signs at different times in our lives. Even in the poorest circumstances or in the midst of a disaster a sign of God's presence can become very real. There was a story on the News recently about one of the nurses who had been attending covid cases. A picture which spoke very vividly was that of her holding the hand of one of the patients in a gentle and reassuring way, at a time when no visitors were permitted ; a sign of God's presence in the world.

As you look at your own lives I'm sure you can see signs along the way when the presence of God was made evident to you.

These will be different for all of us, but nevertheless, if we are open to God's presence, we will recognise the signs for the indication that God is with us. I have experienced this on so many occasions throughout my life, but these are probably not the same as the experiences you will have had yourselves.

I trust that you will think about these times in your life, and rejoice in the sign that comes to us once again today, the baby born so many years ago, God's Presence in the world.

Pastor Miriam Darlow

HYMN: TIS 311

**Silent night, holy night:
all is calm, all is bright
round the virgin mother and child,
holy infant so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace**

**Silent night, holy night:
shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing "Alleluia!
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born"**

**Silent night, holy night:
wondrous star, lend your light;
with the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King;
Christ our Saviour is born,
Christ our Saviour is born.**

*Melody by Francis Xavier Gruber 1787-1863
Joseph Mohr 1792-1848, tr. John Freeman Young 1820-85 alt*

Dedication of Offering:

Notices:

Prayers of the People & The Lord's Prayer

Sending Out:

Bethlehem is the beginning, not the end of our journey with Christ. As you leave this place may you take with you the joy of Mary, the dreams of Joseph, the wonder of the shepherds, and the song of the angels.

May the blessing of Christmas enable us to be a blessing to others.

**We go from here with the light of Christ
shining in our hearts. Amen**

HYMN: TIS 778 "Shalom"