**15th December 2019 Advent 3a**

*Many churches like to include a specific Advent litany at the commencement of their services during the season of Advent. There are many versions but most are focused on the use of candles. This reflects the Northern Hemisphere’s season of Winter. For the Australian context, one of the Partnership’s ministers, Ps Annette Buckley created an Advent Wreath and Litany based on the use of Water. If you would like a copy of the full text for the season of Advent of this litany, go to our Resources page of our web site at:* [*https://www.macedonrangesunitingchurch.org.au/resources-and-event-diary*](https://www.macedonrangesunitingchurch.org.au/resources-and-event-diary)*. You can also see there some examples of how this watery wreath has been displayed. This week’s litany is listed below. A brief explanatory note is included as an introduction. Remember this litany is copyrighted to Annette but she gives permission for is use and adaption in your worship service.*

If you would rather use a more traditional candle based wreath and litany for the Advent season, Act For Peace, the organisation who run the Christmas Bowl, provide excellent resources for both the litany and worship resources. Go to <https://www.actforpeace.org.au/Christmas-Bowl/Resources> for details of their range of resources. They include PowerPoints, service prayers and litanies and video material about the ministry and work of the Christmas Bowl appeal.

**A Watery Advent Wreath and Litany** *(© A Buckley)*

**An explanation and introduction:**

See the material from Advent 1a for details of the explanation and introduction for those who may not have been present for the first weeks.

**Litany week 3: Joy**

L: As we pour the water for our Advent wreath we remember our deep thirst for God’s joy.

***Response: We long for your joy, O God***

L: Joy which soaks into us and makes our world stand still, like a sudden summer downpour.

***Response: We long for your joy, O God***

L: Joy which makes our soul dance like kids under a sprinkler on the lawn.

***Response: We long for your joy, O God***

L: Joy which becomes the centre of our life with others like the water boiling in the kettle for a cuppa with friends.

***Response: We long for your joy, O God***

L: You may name people and places which are in particular need of God’s joy at this time (some examples follow, but you may have more):

People spending Christmas far away from loved ones

People feeling pressure to buy expensive presents

People living with mental health problems, especially depression

People around the world suffering the effects of disasters

People facing the possibility of losing their homes or farmland

People living in isolation

People living with the loss of their abilities and independence

People struggling to be faithful in difficult circumstances

L: Advent God, we worship you with joy.

***Response: We long for your joy, O God***

**A short but structured service**

*(other suggestions and alternatives are below)*

**Gathering**

**Call to worship**

The joy of the Advent Christ be with you all.

***And also with you.***

He comes to liberate prisoners,

and to open the eyes of the blind;

to lift up those who are ground down,

and to pour love upon believers;

to watch over homeless refugees,

and stand up for widow and orphan.

Even the arid wilderness shall be glad,

and the desert blossom like the rose.

**Prayer of Approach** *© B. D. Prewer*

Holy God, Source of abundant love, peace and joy, we worship you with grateful, happy hearts. As we continue our Advent journey, help us to trust you more fully, to enjoy you more freely, and to serve you more eagerly. Let all our preparations be focussed on going to meet you as you speedily come to us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Amen!***

**Hymn**

**Advent Litany** *(the Advent Litany can be placed here or alternatively used as a Call to Worship)*

**Prayer of confession**

We come to make our confession, not as paid servants but as the children of a most loving Parent.

Let us pray

Holy God, you have sent one true Messiah to us, whose ways are grace and truth. Please persist with your mercy towards your errant children. We are slow learners. In spite of the clear ways you have come to us in days gone by, we keep looking in the wrong direction for happiness. We are attracted by cheap friendships, treasure the counterfeit values, and spend our energies on third rate pleasures.

If we have been taken in by superficial messiahs who dazzle us with the latest fashions in everything from clothes to food to morality: Lord have mercy.

***Lord have mercy!***

If we have allowed ourselves to be impressed by false messiahs who tailor their message to maintain their own popularity rather than deliver truth. Lord have mercy.

***Lord have mercy!***

If we have been seduced by secular messiahs who with erudite sophistication offer us an outlook devoid of any ultimate purpose or value. Lord have mercy.

***Lord have mercy!***

God of Messiah Jesus and our God, convict us of our sin. Bring us to a sharp stop. Turn us around from the wrong directions we have taken. Return us to the truth, mercy and peace of your healing grace. In the unparalleled blessing of forgiveness and rehabilitation, may we find our peace and strength. In the name of Christ Jesus our Redeemer.

***Amen!***

**Word of Assurance**

Friends in Christ, let the past now be the past. Seize this precious moment. You are a forgiven community, a family of hope rooted in God-deep optimism. You are the most fortunate of people.

***Thanks be to God.***

*(often the Psalm may be used for the prayer and/or the word of grace)*

**Service of the Word**

**Psalm for the day – PSALM 146: 5-10** *© B.D. Prewer (the alternative Psalm is from or Luke 1: 47-55)*

Happiness is in letting God help us,

in pinning our hopes on the Creator

***who spun the starry skies and planet earth,***

***shaped great oceans and all creatures;***

Who keeps every promise to us,

vindicating the oppressed,

***providing food for the hungry,***

***and setting prisoners free***

Our God gives sight to blind eyes,

and lifts up those who have been flattened.

***Our God loves all who are true blue,\****

***and keeps an eye on the refugee.***

Our God stands up for widow and orphan,

but brings down haughty oppressors.

***Our God will always be there for us;***

***sing your heart out for all generations***

*(\*‘true blue’ = “utterly reliable” in Aus. vernacular)*

**Epistle or Old Testament/alternate reading:** **Isaiah 35: 1-10** **or James 5: 7-10**

**Gospel reading: Matthew 11: 2-11**

**Short reflection and discussion** *(see links below)*

(Hymn)

**Prayers for others**

**Sharing of concerns**

**Sharing of notices**

**Prayers**

Merciful Friend, we bend our wills to yours, so that in our prayers and deeds we may be a lively part of the fulfilment of your Word.

We call to mind those whose hands seem weak and shaky: the sick and the palsied, the weary and the timid, the sorely tempted and the guilty;

***God of promises, by your grace, strengthen the weak hands.***

We call to mind those whose trembling legs seem unable to bear the load: the aged and the infirm, the oppressed and those threatened with violence;

***God of promises, come to your people and steady the trembling knees.***

We call to mind those who are filled with consternation or fear: the wrongly accused or the abused, the refugee or the victims of war;

***God of promises, say those of a fearful heart: fear not, I am with you..***

We call to mind those who are blind: both those whose sight is physically impaired and those who have excellent vision but can’t seem to see the things that really matter.

***God of promises, today let the eyes of the blind be opened.***

We call to mind those who are deaf: the many who live wonderful lives, and for those who have keen hearing but remain deaf to truth and wisdom.

***God of promises, today let the ears of the deaf be unsealed.***

We call to mind all those without the use of their legs: victims of birth defect or accidents, the frail and the diseased., some bedridden, and many in wheelchairs.

***God of promises, be with the lame that they may leap like the deer.***

We call to mind the affliction of the dumb: the many who are mute, some tongue tied, and some who because of painful shyness rarely speak;

***God of promises, loosen the tongue of the deaf that they may sing for joy***

O you who are indefatigable love, please continue your deeds of mercy to all people everywhere. With the assistance of your church, and with the help of all people of goodwill, may the shadows of darkness and pain be driven back, and all people live in the joy of your marvellous light. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Amen.***

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Sending forth the people of God**

**Offering** (a sharing of our gifts and the call to bless others as we have been blessed)

**Hymn**

**Blessing and commissioning**

Go well.

That you may take with you a joyful spirit and a level head, and deal with the pressing pre-Christmas activities without frustration or ill will, I bless you.

***Amen!***

That you may make a little space for prayer and reflection, so that the remainder of Advent shall prepare you to sincerely marvel at the Bethlehem happening, I bless you.

***Amen!***

There will always be with you

the saving grace of Christ Jesus,

the encircling love of God,

and the energising friendship of the Spirit.

***Amen!***

\*Note: all prayers and litanies above, are courtesy ©B D Prewer. It was Bruce’s intention that the prayers and litanies be adapted by each user to their own situation. This material can only be used for worship with acknowledgement and not otherwise reproduced without permission. Thank you to the estate of Bruce Prewer for allow us to publish his material here. Contact <http://www.bruceprewer.com> for details.

**A shorter prayer service**

*(may include some of the above material in the following format. Hymns may be included if desired and music is available)*

Greet each other

Prayer (may include invocation, adoration, confession and recognition of grace)

Reading: Psalm 146: 5-10 or Luke 1: 47-55

Gospel reading: Matthew 11: 2-11

Sharing and discussion of the readings

Sharing of concerns

Prayers for others (see above, may involve one or several people praying; may involve the use of symbolic actions as part of the prayers)

(Conclude with the Lord’s Prayer)

Blessing

***Howard Wallace suggests*** *(see****:*** [*http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/*](http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/)*)*

The whole psalm could be adapted for the **prayer of adoration**:

Praise the LORD!
***Praise the LORD, O my soul!***
I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
***I will sing praises to my God all my life long.***
Praise the God of Jacob,
***who made heaven and earth, the sea,***
and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;
***who executes justice for the oppressed;***
who gives food to the hungry.
***The LORD sets the prisoners free;***
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
***The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;***
the LORD loves the righteous.
***The LORD watches over the strangers;***
he upholds the orphan and the widow.
***Praise the LORD!***

Some verses could also be used in the **prayer of confession** in conjunction with the Kyrie.

The psalmist says:
Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
***When we place our trust in things of no substance***
***Lord have mercy.***

The LORD executes justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry,
and sets the prisoners free.
***When we neglect the plight of those in need,***
***Christ have mercy.***

The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow.
***When we fail to see loneliness in our midst,***
***Lord have mercy.***

Finally, v. 5 can be incorporated into the final **blessing**:

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God,
for the LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
And now the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you now and forevermore.
***Amen***

Howard often uses the NRSV but other versions can be used such as Nathan Nettleton’s paraphrase (found at <http://www.laughingbird.net/LaughingBird/Welcome.html>), The Message, Bruce Prewer’s adaptations (both paraphrases) or the New Living Translation. The Message and New Living Translation are accessible via [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

**For sermon and/or reflection preparation**

Pilgrim Theological College has launched a new web site with podcasts reflecting on Advent and preaching in the Year of Matthew. Go to <http://bythewell.com.au/>. There is a new one each week and are produced about 2 weeks before the particular Sunday being addressed. They are focusing this year on the readings from Isaiah. These are a great resources, are easy to understand and access. You could easily play them in your service and then invite discussion afterwards. Be aware though that each one goes for over 20 minutes.

**Songs which may bring deeper reflection are** – lots to consider:

*(Some of these songs are more appropriate if using a candle based wreath and litany but you can still incorporate them into your service even if you are using Annette’s water based wreath and litany.)*

TIS 265/AHB 193 O come, O come, Emmanuel

TIS 271/AHB 198 The advent of our God
TIS 272/AHB 200 Come, thou long expected Jesus

TIS 289 Christmas is coming, the church is glad to sing

TIS 647 Comfort, comfort

DMAC    *kid-friendly* Get ready, get ready (*this is one of David MacGregor’s see below for the link to his site where you can download the music, lyrics and an mp3 snippet)*

TIS 90/AHB 44 I'll praise my maker while I've breath

TIS 717 Give thanks with a grateful heart

TIS 288 Not the powerful, not the privileged
TIS 161/AHB 109 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

TIS 687 God gives us a future

TIS 210/AHB 141  O for a thousand tongues to sing.

TIS 268/AHB 224 Joy to the world!

the 70s rock musical: Godspell Prepare ye the way of the Lord

TIS 746 The heavens shall declare

TIS 738 Shout to the Lord

David MacGregor has a range of contemporary songs. You may like to select one to learn. He often provides a downloadable mp3 file, music and lyrics for songs that are his own. His site is at: <https://togethertocelebrate.com.au/>

**Other Creative suggestions:**

* Visuals are very appropriate for most services. Art works can be used to draw people into the stories. http://www.textweek.com/yeara/adventa1.htm has links to artworks and movie suggestions related to the themes arising from the Bible readings. Some of these are by some of the greats and others by world class contemporary artists.
* Why not use the song from *Godspell,* “Prepare ye the way of the Lord”. You could play a recording or have someone sing it a’ cappella as a call to worship. It could lead into a whole range of activities or litanies.
* You could place a stump or log section along with other items that are imaged in the readings. Blackening the stump and placing a sprig of green on it or set to come out of the stump reminds of the Australian bush and the reality of fires. The green reminds of the regrowth after fires and points to the hope in the coming one. Over Advent you could develop the images with the stump including garden tools, blue cloth, flowers from native trees and much more. You could also display images of regrowth after bush fires around the worship space.
* Ann suggests a Listening song: *Flowing Over Me*, by Derri Daugherty on Flap Your Wings. She says this song matches in beautifully with the Isaiah reading.
* Ann suggests a video clip from the story of Christmas told by the kids of St Paul's Church, Auckland, New Zealand called an *Unexpected Christmas*. I have used it on numerous occasions and it is to be highly recommended. The producers of this video also have made some other great videos around the Christmas story and are well worth exploring. Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM1XusYVqNY&feature=emb_logo> and you will find this video but also to links to other videos they have done.
* Over several years, a video competition was held in the UK called The Nativity Factor. Many excellent videos were produced with a modern take on the story. Some of the angel stories may suit an Advent theme. Many are still available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=The+nativity+factor>. Check them out. It is well worth the time spent.
* Ann suggests a response activity: *Give everyone a green leaf made of cardboard or paper and a pen and have an advent wreath somewhere in your worship space with a pile of nappy (diaper) pins beside it. Explain that God calls us to be part of the healing and transformation of others. Ask: How are we doing that? How can we do this specifically in some practical way this Christmas? Write what you think you can do on the leaf and attach it to the Advent wreath. Pick up a pin and return to your seat and hold it as the above intercession is prayed. (If you used the pins this last week I would advise against using them this week!)*
* Jeff Shrowder suggests where you are using Matthew 11:2-11 as your key passage: *The blue cloth symbolising the Flood, baptism and John the Baptist over the past two weeks, this week symbolises healing, blessing and birth, and the one for who the messenger prepares the way. Again, the stones used last week could be used again to symbolise the wilderness.*
* Seasons of the Spirit is a resource package available through Media Com. They have weekly resources available that can be purchased. They have great resources for all ages, creative ideas and thoughtful suggestions for reflection and sermon development. If you want to check it out, speak to Rev Peter or contact our Romsey congregation who use the material often*.*

**Other resources**

* See the Resources page of our web site for an extensive list of links and other resources.
* Our Romsey congregation has access to Seasons of the Spirit materials. Contact Jay for details as to what is available.
* Bruce Prewer’s web site has sermons and prayers. Go to <http://www.bruceprewer.com/>.
* Nathan Nettleton’s site has paraphrase versions of the readings, sermons and prayers. Go to <http://www.laughingbird.net/LaughingBird/Welcome.html>.
* Ann Scull has some great suggestions for creative worship. Go to <http://seedstuff.blogspot.com.au/>.
* Sacredise is a great web site that has a huge range of resources. Go to <http://sacredise.com/>.
* David McGregor has some great suggestions for contemporary music and songs. Go to <http://togethertocelebrate.com.au/>
* Geoff Shrowder has suggestions for the use of the Psalm, often a thoughtful piece and suggestions for hymns. Go to <http://thebillabong.info/>.
* Many other resources are available on the web site