



BELMONT UNITING CHURCH



5th December Weekly Newsletter 2021

2021 - THE YEAR OF HOPE

Prepare the Way – For the Light is Coming!

Greeting folks! It is so great to be back with you again. If you have not noticed - it is December already - where has the year gone! So, before we talk Christmas and all that it brings, I want to remind us again that it is the second week of our journey in the season of Advent – a season of waiting, hoping, expecting of the coming of the Light of the World.

Advent means "coming." Something's or Someone's coming - and it's not just Santa. The light of the world is coming. It's just around the corner, close by, on the horizon - you only have to reach out a bit, and you can touch it - that's the message. But Advent isn't just about what and who is coming to us. It's also about the journey we are taking, the journey that leads us to our true home, that place of welcome we long for, being guided by the light of the world.



Just as Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, the shepherds to the manger crib, the wise men from their distant lands, we are called to be on the move towards the light this Advent. It is a journey of coming home to the God who loves us and helping others to come home to the place of joy and peace and love. A welcoming place to be with God. We do that through prayer and reflection and we also do it as we give to those in need through the Christmas Bowl appeal amongst others and as we campaign for justice and peace in a world that doesn't believe in Christmas anymore. A world made so alien and different because of Covid 19.

As we begin to enjoy a sense of relief and freedom from the long shadow of COVID, the new Omicron variant of the virus has dampened our spirit. If you are reading this with any degree of pessimism and feeling tired already about how this new variant might impact our newfound freedom, longing for a clearer and smoother path and a way forward perhaps, our Gospel reading from Luke for this week may just be what you need as encouragement. This week's Gospel story begins in a geographically low place: the wilderness region around the River Jordan. Jesus' ministry begins in this low place (though that is in the next part of Luke chapter 3). Jesus' ministry also began in a socially low place – not in some highly magnificent palace, suitable for one born to be king or in a grand temple, a home suitable perhaps for the Son of God. It began in a stable.

The wilderness and a stable – how different to the ways of the world: where status is so important, where the place you went to school, or university – if you went to university – is considered so important by some; where wanting to become a celebrity is the life goal of significant numbers of people. Society looks at these things and says: the grander, the higher, the better! And if you don't have, or can't achieve these things, you lose out. But John, and Jesus, say 'No.' That is not the way. The way – the way of the Lord – takes a different path. The way of the Lord – straight, level and smooth – has no obstacles in the way, no hurdles that must be overcome; no 'grander, higher, better to keep people out.

To those who would travel this way, the message couldn't be plainer: repent and be baptized by water and the Holy Spirit and follow Jesus. To those who have already taken this step: we know that what sounds simple is, in fact, a lifelong process of becoming more Christ-like, or – to use Malachi's words – of purifying experiences. But the challenge of today's Bible readings is that we must do nothing – nothing at all – that might obscure the message that Jesus is for all, or that makes the way of the Lord anything other than straight, level and smooth for those who want to travel it with us.

Rev Ikani.

Worship At Home

Advent 2: Place

Acknowledgement of Country

We, the people of Belmont Uniting Church acknowledge the Wauthaurong Peoples, the first inhabitants of the land we live and worship since time beyond remembering. We acknowledge that through this land, God nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples.

A Prayer of Approach

We come to you this Advent, Lord, with gratitude in our hearts for those who have led us to faith, for those who have prepared the way for us to hear your voice calling us and to receive your love surrounding us. May we too prepare the way for others, that all may feel a sense of belonging in your Church and in your world. Amen.

Notes on the Bible readings

Luke 3.1-6 • Malachi 3.1-4 • Luke 1.68-79 • Philippians 1.3-11

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight...and all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Luke 3.4b,6).

Christmas Cards

Since Victorian times it has been a custom to send Christmas cards, conveying our personal greetings to friends and family, especially to those who live some distance away. For many, this may be the only opportunity in the year to keep connected with those whose paths crossed ours at an earlier time of our lives. As you write your Christmas cards and greetings (or send them electronically) this year, take time to reflect on how your list of recipients reflects the story of your life, and the places and situations you have been a part of.

Who are the people you value in this way? How do they fit into the story of your life?

Is there any significance in how or when these people became involved in your life? Acknowledge, too, if this brings to mind the sadness of losses. As a family or church group, can you share the story of your connections to some of the more far-flung recipients or those who have been part of your life for the longest?

As we ponder the coming of Christ, can you think of ways to extend your connections into new places? Is social media able to help us to spread positive messages to a wider audience? Could you send cards or messages to victims of injustice supported by Amnesty International, to refugees far from home, or to fellow Christians elsewhere in the world through a church twinning scheme?

Pray

God of the journey, we thank you for the network of relationships we treasure at this time of year. Give us hearts to send your love ever wider into the world, taking our small part in helping 'all people to see the salvation of God'. Amen.

A personal prayer

Eternal God, you called John when he was in the wilderness, to prepare the way for your Son. Speak to me in my wildernesses of tiredness, anxiety and longing, and prepare a way in my heart, that I may receive the forgiveness, the healing, and the peace that your Son delights to give. Amen.

Live your faith

Listen out for the voices of people on the margins of our society. Are they calling for the values of the kingdom of God? How can you add your voice to theirs?

Questions for reflection

- ▶ How does this labyrinth draw you in?
- ▶ Where are you on this journey?
- ▶ Does the light of God guide you?



Blue Christmas Service:

A service of remembrance, comfort and hope.

Sunday 5th of December at 3.00pm

As a year comes close to its end, as we think about festivities to come, however they might look in this strange and disturbing year, we acknowledge that although many of us are filled with excitement and anticipation, for others, this can be a painful time.

As we emerge from the lockdowns, and upon reflection on our journey in the last two years, we are keenly aware of the impact COVID 19 has had in our lives. The anguish of broken relationships, the weariness of ill health, the pain of isolation – all these can make us feel very alone in the midst of this 'happy family time'. And for some of us, this is our first Christmas without our loved one.

We need space and time to acknowledge our sadness and concern. We need to know that we are not alone. We need to know that God is with us; Emmanuel.

Join with us in sharing and hearing prayers, scripture, and music that acknowledge that God is present with those who mourn, for those who grieve, for those who struggle. God's Word comes to shine light into our darkness.

All are welcome.

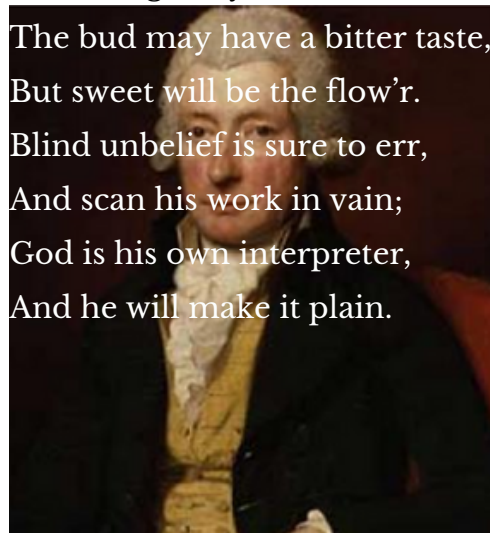
Light Shining out of Darkness

William Cowper

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sov'reign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;

Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.





Belmont Uniting Church December Roster 2021



Date	Time	Leader	Leader's Steward	Readers	Greeters & Ushers	PowerPoint	PA Operator	Organist
Dec 5	10.00am	Rev. Ikani	J. Ferguson	A. Merritt	E. Wood C. Schaller	B. Vaitohi	M. Richards	L. Rankin

Dec 5	Communion	Flowers		Morning Tea	Covid Marshall - Ray			
	Ros Buckwell, L. Jackson	J. Kelly		R. Pearson				
	B. Couper, C. Collins			L. Moss, A. Merritt				

Blue	Time	Leader	Leader's Steward	Readers	Greeters & Ushers	PowerPoint	PA Operator	Organist
Christmas	3:00pm	Rev. Ikani	Fellowship Comm.	N/A	Fellowship Comm.	B. Vaitohi	C. Rankin	L. Rankin
		COVID Marshall	Bill Jennings		Afternoon Tea			

Fellowship Committee

Date	Time	Leader	Leader's Steward	Readers	Greeters & Ushers	PowerPoint	PA Operator	Organist
Dec 12	10.00am	Rev. Ikani	Ros Buckwell	I. Goodwin	H. McCann	B. Vaitohi	R. Bunting	L. Rankin
					R. Ferguson			

Dec 12	Communion	Flowers		Morning Tea	Covid Marshall - Glen			
	N/A	J. Kelly		S. & B. Jennings				
				M. Bullock				

Date	Time	Leader	Leader's Steward	Readers	Greeters & Ushers	PowerPoint	PA Operator	Organist
Dec 19	10.00am	Rev. Ikani	L. Moss	R.&J. Ferguson	R.&J. Jeffers	B. Vaitohi	B. Jennings	L. Rankin
	Communion	Flowers		Morning Tea	Covid Marshall - Ray			
	N/A	A. Merritt		A. & R. Bunting				
				E. Wood				

Thank you to these willing people for keeping our Church services going. If you need to swap please endeavour to do so or if finding it difficult phone Julie 0418996592

Prayer Points For the Week

Dear God, we give You thanks, on this the second day of Advent, for Jesus, Your greatest gift. You have shown Your love for mankind by sending us Jesus Christ and illumined our lives by His presence.

Dear Lord, You have given us the gift of love; this Advent Season let us share this gift with others. Keep us mindful that the essence of love is not to receive it but to give it, today and forever.

Loving God, we pray for church agencies which provide care and support for people in need. As we approach Christmas help us to focus on the spiritual significance of this time, not on the commercialism and the emphasis on spending excessively.

Peter Woods

Lectionary Readings

Dec 5 - Advent 2

Mal 3: 1 - 4
Lk 1: 68 - 79
Phil 1: 3 - 11
Lk 3: 1 - 6

Dec 12 - Advent 3

Zep 3: 14 - 20
Is 12: 2 - 6
Phil 4: 4 - 7
Lk 3: 7 - 18

Dec 19 - Advent 4

Mic 5: 2 - 5
Psalm 80: 1 - 7
Heb 10: 5 - 10
Lk 1: 39 - 45, (46 - 55)

Dec 24/25 - Christmas Day 1 Is 9: 2 - 7
Christmas Day 2 Is 62: 6 - 12
Christmas Day 3 Is 52: 7 - 10

Ps 96
Ps 97
Ps 98

Tit 2: 11 - 14
Tit 3: 4 - 7
Heb 1: 1 - 4, (5 - 12)

Luke 2: 1 - 14, (15 - 20)
Luke 2: (1 - 7), 8 - 20
John 1: 1 - 14

Dec 26 - Christmas 1 1 Sam 2: 18 - 20, 26 Ps 148 Col 3: 12 - 17 Luke 2: 41 - 52

Angels

The word "angel" comes from the Greek word meaning "messenger." Like the bell and angel communicates news from God to the people. Angels appeared both to Mary and Joseph, bringing news that Mary would give birth to Jesus. Angels also appeared to the shepherds in the fields to announce Jesus' birth.



Star

The star is an Epiphany symbol, reflecting Matthew's story of how the star helped the Magi to find the Christ Child. Jesus is also called the "bright morning star" in the book of Revelation.





LOOKING AHEAD

Sunday 5 December	-	10.00am ~ Advent 2 (Holy Communion)	-	Rev Ikani
		3.00pm - Blue Christmas Service		~ Rev Ikani
Sunday 12 December	-	10.00am ~ Advent 3	-	Rev Ikani Vaitohi
Sunday 19 December	-	10.00am. ~ Advent 4	-	Rev Ikani Vaitohi
		7.30 pm. - Christmas Carols Service	-	OASIS Group
Friday 24 December	-	7.30pm - Christmas Eve Service	-	Rev Ikani Vaitohi
Saturday 25 December	-	9.00am - Christmas Day Service.	-	Rev Ikani Vaitohi
Sunday 26 December	-	9.00am - Christmas 1	-	TBA

CHRISTMAS CARDS SUPPORTING UNITING VIC/TAS have been ordered and are available for purchase on Sunday during morning tea. There will be 5 cards in each bundle @ \$5.50 per bundle, with 5 different designs to choose from. All 5 cards in each bundle will be the same. Please bring the correct notes/coins for your purchase. "The early bird catches the worm." (A project of the Mission and Outreach Committee.)

Uplifting Messages

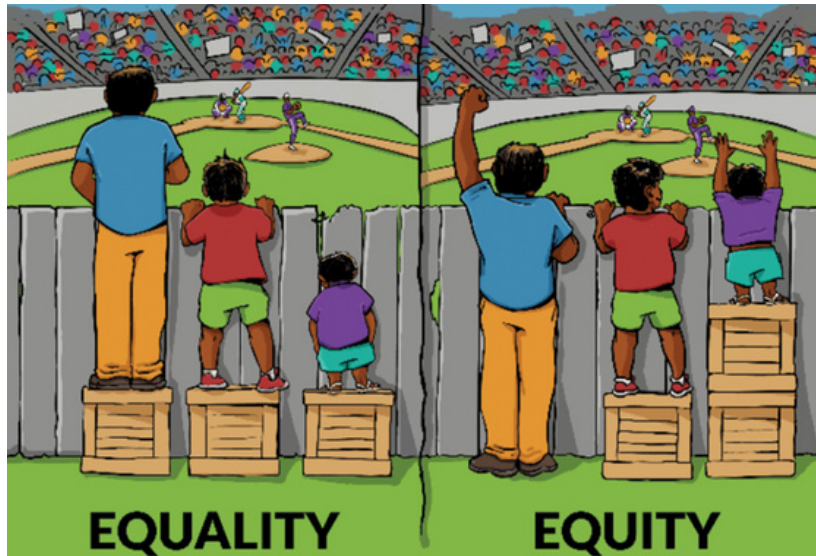
Most of the messages and images we see in the media either attempt to sell us stuff we don't need or deliver bad news. It's rare to see messages entirely meant to lift our spirits. But we can change that. Put an uplifting message on a button, T-shirt, or bumper sticker just to spread some good cheer anonymously. "Have a nice day" has seen its day, but a simple "YES!" or "Thank you!" would do the job nicely, or maybe an affirming, "I'm glad you're here" or "Magic happens." Look around for great little sayings that lift your spirits, jot them down, and print them up. They will make at least one person's day.

Raise Your Spirits

Jesus was a Jew, and the celebration of Hanukkah is currently occurring until December 6. Humans are social animals. We thrive in community, and wherever two or more are gathered, there is opportunity for celebration. Explore the celebrations of different religious denominations: Raise the roof at a great gospel-church service or attend a friend's Passover Seder. You can also get high on community at outdoor parades and festivals. Enjoy live music, great food, fun vendors, and the fellow members of your species. Find an open-air concert, farmers' market, or art opening, or even a public park on a sunny day. These communal events can raise your spirits in another way.

Lorraine Leitch

Missional Moments



Which is better:
equality or equity?
Indeed, what is the
difference?

*The image is by Angus
Maguire for the Interaction
Institute for Social Change.*



What makes Christmas?

For weeks the shops have been telling us. Shelves loaded with presents, toys for the children of every age. So much choice. "Not like that in my day" says Grandpa, "we were lucky to get anything in those days of the Depression and the war, kids don't know how lucky they are. Do they really appreciate it?"

Father Christmas look-a-likes galore. Puddings for sale, drinks. 'Order seafood now' says the sign. Car-ols and Christmas songs try to send their message over noisy shoppers. Breakups and parties at kinder, school and work.

In churches, choirs practise, ministers prepare sermons, maybe a Christmas tree for gifts for the needy. Christmas lights in windows of homes and streets feature colourful and creative displays. Plans to visit the Myer window with the children, and join the long queue to

follow the story for this year. Children prepare a list to prompt Santa to leave them their much wanted present.

Secret family discussions and whispers. What will I give so and so? And so it goes on.

But in all the busyness we must not lose sight of the reason for the season. It is so simple, yet pro-found. At that first Christmas long ago, the scene was a stable in an inn. Outside was a bright star, shepherds in the fields, angels singing in the heavens, three kings on their way to visit a baby so spe-cial, a promised king. So guided, there he was inside, warm and safe, with Mary and Joseph. They were a family, a very special family.

Christmas is above all family, ours, and the world family. Let us not forget this Christmas, those who have no home, food, warmth, shelter and means to celebrate Christmas as we do. How blessed we are.

Reflection:

Put a bowl on the table at Christmas dinner for the Christmas Bowl Appeal, as a reminder for each to add a thank-you gift for the blessings of Christmas. And remember, holding hands, to say Grace, and praise God for sending his special gift of Jesus. For He is the reason for the season.



Children's Activities

Name _____

ROOTS Activity sheet

5-11 December 2021 | Advent 2

Luke 3.1-6

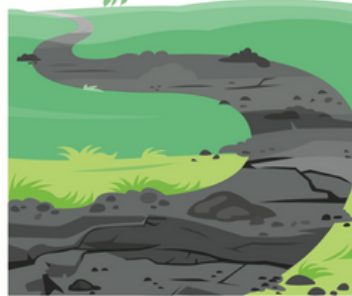
John prepares the way for Jesus, making it clear that Jesus will be for all people.



John tells the crowds about Jesus.



Look at the rough and windy road below. Can you draw a smooth and straight road?



Can you spot the five differences in these pictures of valleys and mountains?



Circle whether each statement is true or false.

Jesus came only for the powerful people

True/False

John used the words of the prophet Isaiah

True/False

John used the words of the prophet Elijah

True/False

John baptized people when they repented

True/False

The prophet said the mountains will be raised up

True/False

Jesus is for everyone

True/False

Tiberius was Emperor of Rome. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Herod was ruler of Galilee and Philip and Lysanias were the other local rulers. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. These were the powerful people when the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah. John went through the whole district around the river Jordan, teaching people that they must repent and turn away from sin, and be baptized, as a sign of a new way of life with God.

The prophet Isaiah had described it like this when he said: 'A voice will cry out in the wilderness: "Prepare a way for the Lord! Make his paths straight. All the valleys will be filled in, and the mountains lowered down to make the road smooth and straight. Then everyone will see how God will save us."'

Luke 3.1-6



Did you know?

- Repent means saying sorry to God for what you have done; having a change of heart.

- A prophet is someone who wrote down messages from God, a long time ago, about the promised Messiah.

The great leveller

Luke 3.1-6

John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, preaches the word of God in the land surrounding the river Jordan. John preaches a baptism for changed hearts and lives, in order to make way for Jesus and fulfil the prophecy as spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'prepare the way of the Lord'. Isaiah shows that Jesus' message is one of equality – not just for certain people.

Now read **Luke 3.1-6** see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

As John prepares the hearts and lives of the crowds around him for Jesus' coming, we are also in a time of preparation for Christmas. This time of Advent is of course about preparing for the festivities, but this passage reminds us it is also about preparing for the true meaning of Christmas, and the message of love and hope and equality which Jesus brings. How can you bring that meaning into your preparations?



John tells us that Jesus is to be the great leveller, meaning Jesus will bring equality. If you are buying or making Christmas gifts this week, could you also buy for someone less fortunate than yourself? Try and buy an extra toy or create a box of goodies for a local children's charity, so that we too can become levellers in our communities this Christmas.



Create a Christingle using a large orange to represent the world, a red ribbon tied around it to show Jesus' love poured out, sweets on four cocktail sticks as the four corners of the world, and a candle in the centre of the orange, to symbolise Jesus as the light of the world. Put equal amounts of sweets on the sticks, to show how Jesus came to bring equality for all. Light the candle, and pray for any areas of the world which are in need of Jesus' love and light this Christmas.



Ask yourself: How might this image help us explore 'Jesus is for all'?

Christmas MESSAGE

Create your own Christmas cards this year. Include within them your favourite Bible verse or an encouraging message from Scripture, to tell others about Jesus the great leveller and all he has done for you.



Silent night

How often do we find silence and calm in the month of December? Does it feel like the busiest month to you? Can it sometimes feel like we are too busy to spend time with God? Try to be still and spend some time in silent prayer. Light a tall candle, and watch and wait as it begins to melt. Do this every night during Advent as we await Jesus' birth. How do you think Mary felt that first Christmas, waiting for Jesus? How do you think John felt, waiting for Jesus? How do you feel, waiting for Jesus?

WILDERNESS WALK

In our passage this week, we hear about the wilderness where John is preaching. Wrap up warm and take a walk in your local area. You could create a nature tick list, checking off things from the passage which you experience along the way, such as a path and/or valley, and when you are treading on rough or smooth ground. As you walk, take time to consider some paths in your life: What do they look like? Are there ups and downs/rough and smooth?