

CHRISTMAS DAY
2023
CAVES BEACH

We gather to celebrate the birth of the one who is the light of the world. We are here to worship God - and his Son Jesus - born this night in Bethlehem of Judea.

We light the candle of hope to remind us of the promises made by all the prophets that God would raise up a saviour for his people Israel.

Christ is our hope and our salvation. He calls us to share our hope in him with each other.

We light the candle of peace to remind us that it is only with God and by following in his path that true peace can be found.

Christ brings the peace of God to us. He calls us to share the peace he gives with each other.

We light the candle of joy to remind us that God gives joy to every heart that abides in him.

As Mary rejoiced in the birth of Jesus - so his birth in us brings us joy. God calls us to share the joy he gives with each other.

We light the candle of love to remind us that Jesus is God's gift of love to us - and that in him, the light of love triumphs over darkness.

Love never fails - it transforms all those who give it and receive it. God calls us to share his love with each other.

Lighting The Christ Candle

We light the Christ candle to remind us that the light of the world was born this night.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined.

You, O Lord, have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

His name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

He is also called Emmanuel, for in him God is with us.

TIS 286 vs 1-4

Almighty God - you have made this time holy by the gift of your son, born of the Holy Spirit and of Mary.

Upon him rested all your grace, through him has come all your mercy.

Let his light shine within our hearts even more brightly than it shines

from the candles in this place. Help us to hear your word and to celebrate your everlasting love through him. Amen

HYMN 312 Once in royal David's city

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgR48OpNmOA>

READING #1

Isaiah 9:2-7

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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God, with the enthusiasm of the shepherds
we race toward you
eager to look into your eyes

and to see you face to face.
God, the contagious joy of the shepherds
fills our hearts with unencumbered delight
so we sing and spread the word
that you are one with us.
God, with the heart of Mary,
we hold you dear and let you come live in us.
All praise glory and honour be given to you,
extraordinary one,
fragile one,
mysterious one.
Amen.

READING #2

Luke 2:1–14

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

HYMN 318 Away in a Manger

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa7Jj_AZU8U

READING#3

Luke 2: 15-20

8 Now in that same 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!”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of grace and mercy,
We confess that we let ‘stuff’
get in our way of the good news
of salvation given us by the birth of the Christ child:
work stuff, domestic stuff,
annoying stuff, small stuff, important stuff.
We let troubles and expectations,
possessions and work, busyness and laziness,
the vagaries of living in a hectic 24/7 world
distract us from taking the time to spend time with God.
Help us, we pray, to drop what we are doing,
put aside all other things
and spend time basking in the light of the Spirit, gazing at the God of
grace.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

While our gaze might be distracted from God,
God’s loving gaze never falters from us.
Be assured of this. We are forgiven.

HYMN 299 While shepherds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdASbgux6ds>

SERMON

How many different images of Christmas are there?

One thing which strikes me these days is the lack of Christ in Christmas!

As we go to different places and look at the advertising that is dished up
these we only seem to grab glimpses of phrases like ‘Peace on earth!’

So what does this phrase mean and where does it come from? Looking
back at the Christmas narrative we come across the angel singing:

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.”

For many of us Christmas can be anything but peaceful. We put aside
family problems and pretend that ours is a perfect family. Even during
the horrors of World War 1 the opposing troops sang Silent Night to one
another then left their trenches to celebrate the day with one another
before that terrible war resumed.

So why would the Gospel writer include this passage in the narrative. Luke was wanting to clearly set before us the important themes that Christ would go on to share with all of us. This peace was in stark contrast with the 'pax Romana' touted by the all-conquering Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire boasted that they had established peace everywhere but it was a peace which only looked at maintaining the stability of the Empire regardless of the cost to anyone else. Any sign of rebellion or refusal to pay crippling taxes was brutally crushed by the Roman Legions. This peace was for the benefit of a few in Rome at the brutal cost of anyone else.

It is into this context that Luke gives us the account of the birth of Jesus. Luke carefully puts the birth into his perspective of the historical context. Luke names the local Governor as Quirinius and the Emperor at the time was Augustus. It is a bit like putting recent history into context such as referring to the context of the late 1990's by referring to The Prime Minister as John Howard and the Victorian Premier as Jeff Kennett.

Into this contextual reflection comes the story of a census imposed by Rome so that they could better calculate the tax revenue that they needed to sustain the Empire. The imposition is such that even a heavily pregnant woman was forced to follow her husband to his family's hometown of Bethlehem.

Luke goes on to describe how that woman was forced to give birth in a cattle shed among the inn keeper's animals. The first visitors were probably the equivalent of today's outlaws, such as a motorcycle gang. Being shepherds, they were ritually unclean and shunned by society as a whole.

Luke is picking up on Isaiah's images for the promised one: "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The yoke which was referred to by Luke is that of the imperial power of Rome. Into this we have Luke giving us the images of angels announcing the birth of the 'Promised one.' For Luke this heralds the arrival of God's kind of peace on earth with even the most marginalized people, like shepherds, invited.

The concept of God's vision for peace is developed during the rest of the Gospel. This story is being told to people who already knew the birth

story and puts it into context with what comes later during Jesus' ministry.

Luke contrasts the 'peace expounded by Rome' with the peace which God offers. Jesus later recounts how he could call on the armies of heaven if that suited His needs. God doesn't bring peace with force or by stirring up an uprising of those who are oppressed. God is not some remote imperialist power forcing some obscure rules on people. God's peace turns the other cheek, clearly it does not foster bitterness and hatred.

God's peace goes to the cross still sharing words of forgiveness. God's image is of a baby that has been entrusted to us to care for. The powerful message passed on by Christ, in Luke's Gospel, comes into conflict with the powerful local rulers and religious elite to the point that they decided it was better to sacrifice one man rather than coming into disfavour with Rome.

The cross was the powerful message of peace in the middle of disfunction and that was shown out in the tomb being empty after three days. The implications of this message from Luke goes well beyond local, national and international politics. They are clear enough for each of us to absorb and put into practice in the way we treat one another here in Caves Beach and the surrounding areas.

This message of peace should echo with those with whom we have had disagreements since we last looked at peace last Christmas. It applies to the way we interact with difficult people and those with whom we can't agree.

The message of the Christmas event is one which keeps repeating in our faith. It is one which rejects the Roman approach of domination and destruction. We have no need to sacrifice anyone else to pay for our failings.

Luke also shares with us that God is not sending troops to enforce the peace but rather God is fermenting the basis of a new culture of forgiveness and resilient mercy. Today we join together to celebrate the one who unmasked the lies and deceit enforced by Rome and so many others since. Christ's birth represents the chance to be a new people who have moved beyond hostility and violence so that we may grow in grace and love.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth may there be real peace.

HYMN 313 Good Christians all, rejoice

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw5g9kt_ANA&t=5s

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy and loving God,

We see you in our world:

in the people who stop and help someone

who has stumbled on the street;

in the neighbour who brings in everyone's bins;

in the family that picks rubbish off a beach.

We see you in the world:

in the mother who wipes away her child's sad tears:

in the father who reaches out to stop a fall;

in the grandparent who makes a family favourite dessert.

We see you in the world:

in a smile for a stranger

in an 'are you ok' call.

We see you sheltering those without a house and curing the sick,

feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoner

and advocating for those who have lost their voice.

We see you in the world, for you are with us,

you are in us as we are in you, we live in your grace.

This day, let the world know

the peace of the Christ-child, we pray.

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. Amen.

HYMN 304 Vs 1-3 & 4-7 O come all ye faithful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zw-FAqx9kpw>

BENEDICTION

Love has come and lives with us and we have seen it.
go from here overflowing with grace
and assured of God's love for you.
May the God who comes be with us;
the peace of Christ be in us
and the delight of the Spirit fill us.
Amen.