

**CHRISTMAS EVE**  
**24/12/23**  
**CAVES BEACH**

- Last Sunday we lit the candle of joy. We light it and the candles of hope and peace again as we remember that Christ will come again and bring us everlasting peace and joy.

(a person lights the candles of hope, peace, and joy)

- The fourth candle of Advent is the Candle of Love. Its light is meant to remind us of the love that God has for us.

- Jesus shows us God's perfect love. He is God's love in human form. The bible says that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

- Love is patient, love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful or conceited, rude or selfish. Love is not quick to take offense, it keeps no records of wrongs, it does not gloat over other people's troubles, but rejoices in the right, the good, and the true. There is nothing that love cannot face, there is no limit to its faith, to its hope, to its endurance.  
Love never ends.

- We light this candle today to remind us of how God's perfect love is found in Jesus

Light the Fourth Candle

ALL SING - TIS 286 v1-4

- LET US PRAY Loving God, we thank you for your gift of love - shown to us perfectly in Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us prepare our hearts to receive Him.

Bless our worship. Help us to hear and do your word.

We ask it in the name of the one born in Bethlehem. Amen

**Hebrews 1:1-12**

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. 3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,  
"You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you"?

Or again,

"I will be his Father,  
and he will be my Son"?

6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,  
"Let all God's angels worship him."

7 Of the angels he says,  
"He makes his angels winds  
and his servants flames of fire."

8 But of the Son he says,  
"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
and the sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;  
therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

10 And,  
"In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands;

11 they will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like clothing;

12 like a cloak you will roll them up,  
and like clothing[h] they will be changed.

But you are the same,  
and your years will never end."

### **Sermon**

Having Christmas Eve the day before we celebrate Christmas seems to overshadow our normal service. This is why we deliberately have done something different today so as not to distract too much from tomorrow's celebration.

Many of the traditions and images that we associate with Christmas come from the northern hemisphere where they are heading into the

middle of winter. I thought that we should spend some time today reflecting on the nature of Christmas here in Australia.

We are not subject to massive snow storms or the freezing weather that triggers the images of sleigh bells and keeping warm with roaring fires in the fire place. Instead we can be faced with cyclones up north and bush fires just about everywhere else.

Rather than concentrate on the negative I would rather look at the massive collection of gifts that are freely distributed to those in need here in our lucky country. Having for many years been a person who distributed gifts from the Target Giving Tree it was wonderful to hear of the joy which those gifts gave to people who had no other way of celebrating Christmas. I can remember the people from places which supported families with younger children becoming almost as excited as the children would be on Christmas Day as they selected the gifts for their clients.

Unlike our friends up in the northern hemisphere we are also able to look forward to summer holidays and times for the family to gather and catch up after a busy year. It is not that long ago that even this was curtailed by Covid but we have long since resumed our family celebrations.

Many organisations also put on free Christmas meals for those without families and those in need. I think that the biggest one around here is at the sheds on the foreshore of the harbour.

Looking back at the ideas celebrated in our advent candles we have had: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. These are the fruits of that momentous birth in Bethlehem so many years ago.

After our Christmas celebrations tomorrow we will quickly be looking forward to our New Year's celebrations. We can only look in wonder and hope for the new year. As a congregation we are still hoping that the civil works will be substantially completed by the end of the holidays.

On January 26 we will not only have an Australia Day holiday but also applications will close for our proposed Community Engagement person. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to be able to reach out to people in our local area and be able to develop new connections and learn new ways to be the Uniting Church in this magnificent part of Australia.

As we look to the wonder of the message coming out of the Christmas story tomorrow we are equally being drawn into a new year with new possibilities here in this wide brown land of fires and flooding rains.

## **PRAYERS**

Sometimes, God, we do think some things are impossible, even for you.

Mostly, it is love that we think is impossible, usually in the face of fear.

So we do not say, 'I am here', for love, for you, for each other, or even for ourselves.

Instead, with fear, we run, run far away; we hide from love, from you.

Forgive us our fear, Holy One, and restore us to love.

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Greetings, beloved ones,  
Holy One is with you.  
Do not be afraid,  
Holy One looks on you  
with love, with grace.  
You are forgiven.  
Forgiven – now love. Amen.

**We** pray for the lowly, God,  
for the forgotten, the overlooked;  
we pray for people society  
would rather not see.  
We pray for  
the lowest paid, unpaid,  
the unemployed, the pensioner.  
We pray for  
people without housing, the refugee,

the exile, the prisoner.  
We pray for  
the street, office, change room, hospital cleaner,  
the tea towel and uniform washer.  
May prayers go beyond  
words into actions:  
may we pray with enacted love, with seeing,  
with touching, with presence.  
We pray the prayer you taught us all.

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.

### **BEBEDICTION**

God's angel called to Mary:  
Listen, you are invited,  
God is coming to creation,  
get ready!

As you wait a few more hours  
to hear the story of Jesus' birth,  
may you know God with you,  
Holy One, Holy Love. Amen.