

**ADVENT 3**  
**17/12/23**  
**CAVES BEACH**

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

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

- The third candle of Advent is the Candle of Joy. It  
reminds of the joy that Mary felt when the angel  
Gabriel told her that a special child would be born to her - a child who  
would save and deliver his people.

- God wants us all to have joy. The angel who  
announced to the shepherds that Jesus had been born told them: "Do  
not be afraid. I am bringing you good news of a great joy for all people  
- for to you is born this day, in the City of David, a Saviour, who is the  
Messiah, the Lord."

- We light this candle to remember that Christ brings  
the promise of a new life - a life in which the blind  
receive sight, the lame walk, and the prisoners are set free. We  
light it to remember that He is the bringer of true and everlasting joy.

Light the Third Candle

ALL SING - TIS 286 v1-3

- LET US PRAY - Loving God, we thank you for the joy you bring us.  
Help us prepare our hearts for this gift. Bless our worship. Help us to hear  
and to do your word. We ask it in the name of the one born in Bethlehem.  
Amen.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Joy will be felt around the world,

**when the oppressed receive the Good News.**

Joy will break out around the world,

**when the broken-hearted are given support.**

Joy will be celebrated around the world,

**when those held captive know freedom.**

Joy will be experienced around the world,

**when the everlasting joy of God finds expression and purpose in worship.**

### **Opening Prayer**

Jesus, we will search among the most powerful nations, and not find you.

**Jesus, we will search among the most religious men and women, and not find you.**

Jesus, we will search among the momentous events of our time, and not find you.

**Jesus, we will search high and low, in palace, in government, and in church, and not find you.**

Jesus, you will surprise us.

**You will reveal yourself to us in an unexpected call for justice, in an unseen deed of compassion, and in a caring and empowered community.**

**HYMN 152** Joyful, joyful, we adore you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMY3ivdNzwE>

### **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

God of all goodness,

when the young woman Mary hears the words Elizabeth has for her,

her first response is to rejoice.

This is the first response of all creation also.

In Isaiah, the trees clap their hands,

and the hills sing for joy.

We have so much to be thankful for,

so many reasons to rejoice.

We give you thanks, as Mary did,

that you know us and bless us.

We give you thanks, as Mary did,

that you fill the hungry with good things.

We give you thanks, as Mary did,

that you lift the lowly.

We give you our thanks.

**We give** thanks, O God, that you are unchanging, that your concern for justice and righteousness was so strong that you came in human form to share that concern with us in person. We confess that all too often we hesitate to speak or act when we see people being treated unjustly.

Forgive us, O God, for the times when we have been happy to hear the gospel without truly living it.

Forgive us for uncaring attitudes when we base our opinion of another person's worth on what they own, or how they look; on what they say, or how they live, rather than accepting them for who they are - people made in your image.

Forgive us when our longing to live simply and with humility is defeated by selfish desires -

for pursuing profits before seeking your will.

Forgive us for placing our hope in other than the Christ-child born in a poor stable.

Our hope lies in the promise of your mercy, O God, extending to those who fear you from generation to generation.

Heal, restore and bless us, we pray, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

Amen

#### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

May the God of peace cleanse you through and through. The promise is that our whole being - spirit, soul and body will be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (based on 1 Thess 5:23)

Rejoice, then, and give thanks as we receive forgiveness and healing in Christ's name.

Thanks be to God.

#### READINGS

##### · **Luke 1:46b-55**

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favour on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name;

<sup>50</sup> indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones  
and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,  
<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

### **John 1:6–8, 19–28**

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

<sup>19</sup> This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” <sup>20</sup> He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” <sup>22</sup> Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” <sup>23</sup> He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
'Make straight the way of the Lord,' ”

as the prophet Isaiah said.

<sup>24</sup> Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup> They asked him, “Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” <sup>26</sup> John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup> the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.” <sup>28</sup> This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

**HYMN 164** The great love of God

*Sorry no clip to go with this!*

### **SERMON**

Today we light the third candle on our Advent wreath. This one is entitled Joy. To go with this we have the passage from Luke where Mary gives us the Magnificat, a song of joy.

During Advent we will often find ourselves joining in a hymn which includes the word *Emmanuel*. This word carries the meaning ‘God with us.’ Christmas for us is not some passive spectator event, rather it is celebrating the fact that God is with us! God is not some absentee landlord who only turns up when the rent is due.

Many people these days seem to prefer the idea that God should be as far removed from humanity as possible. Many years ago the religious journalist, Alan Gill, wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald about a trailer that he saw for a Christmas themed film featuring Santa Claus. There was one scene where Santa was flying across the sky while the sound track played ‘Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns.’ Alan thought that it was a little blasphemous where these films portrayed some magic person from

outer space who befriends people on earth and shares their miraculous powers with them. After all Christ did more than this.

I often wonder if people think that you can just switch the saviour off and on at will?

Looking to the words of the Magnificat we come across Mary reflecting on the Saviour in her womb being the hope for the world. She speaks about the coming Saviour offering mercy to His followers who have lived in fear from generation to generation. That mercy and grace is still offered to us today.

At the same time the Magnificat attacks the 'Herods' of her time and today as the alien beings portrayed in movies do not have the everlasting promises that Jesus offers. Mary also tells us not only of the tremendous mercy of God but also of God's ability to cut through human pretensions. Jesus words give us the grace which comes on everyone, even the ragged suffering 'prodigal son.'

This song by Mary foreshadows the light covering the world showing up the arrogance and dominion together with the love of power and possessions. This song compares this obsession with Jesus blessing the poor, the meek and the oppressed as well as those who work for justice and those with pure hearts.

Mary's song foreshadowed the liberating power of God and rejoiced in the Saviour she bore in her womb as Christ would revolutionise love. This love would leave no place for violence and stop the fostering of hate. Mary's message promoted the humble heart. This was no alien from another planet but a real human being.

Christmas means that in among all the horrible headlines we have forced on us every day we have Christ who chose to enter this world through the womb of a very ordinary young woman. In this event we have a constant reminder that God wants to connect with us through a relationship which is marked with compassion and sensitivity as well as caring and sharing. Christ offers a connection marked by generosity, humility, self-sacrifice and love. Without these qualities, the rich are poor; with them, the poor are rich, for they give meaning to everything else. But they are not things that we can buy or earn or achieve or own.

Rather than looking at a person's wealth as a measure of determining a person's worth we need to look to Christ. Christ's birth was the pivotal moment where the emphasis changed. When we believe and accept that Christ can be born anew in our hearts this Christmas, we are introduced to this revolution of unconditional love and empowered to carry this love to those who are searching for it in the wrong places.

We are not impassive spectators as the Christmas event constantly challenges us to follow the guidance of the saviour who lives on with unconditional love, even for those who are searching for love in the wrong places. That crib constantly casts a

cross shaped shadow on unjust and corrupt systems that should be demolished and replaced with God's new creation.

It might be easier to switch on a video or go to the pictures and be entertained for an hour or two - to escape into fantasy land and forget what is going on in the world. But Christmas is not about escaping from the world but entering it.

Christmas means rejoicing with Mary that Christ was born and continues to be born in our hearts and lives - enabling us as the hymn says "to tell out - in word and action - the greatness of the Lord. Amen

**HYMN 315** Mine eyes have seen the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ic4wUEpCQ>

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Holy One, we give with joy  
and trust our gifts to the work  
of justice and empowerment for all.  
May it be in the world  
as Mary sang it. Amen.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Christmas is beautiful.....Christmas is busy.... but Jesus had a very busy life too ....  
So he understands us when we feel overwhelmed this time of the year.

I wanted to include beautiful music... the "hallelujah chorus "from the Messiah...or  
the carol. "Oh, holy night.".....from YouTube

However... I'm going to talk about Christmas being busy & Jesus being busy

Busy can be defined as" having a great deal to do."

Synonyms for busy are diligent, active, industrious, vigorous and totally committed.

Well,..... Jesus was very busy during his three years of ministry &

If you read a modern translation of the gospel of Matthew, it will give you a refreshing  
vision of the life of Christ, and just how busy he was... It seems there was no  
stopping....just stepping from one event to another.

Jesus' Baptism was followed by his temptation .....then gathering disciples  
together....& then teaching and healing people from all around Lake Galilee

He trained the disciples on the job and was constantly bombarded. by people in  
need

There was a Roman captain with a needy leper servant... then a person afflicted with Demons... while there were more people wanting to join his team of disciples

Next Jesus got into a boat and needed to calm the storm which threatened the lives of his disciples and himself

When they pulled the boat in beside a cemetery He was greeted by madmen who needed healing

He crossed the lake again in the boat and was greeted by a paraplegic and his friends .....That same day, he ate supper at Matthew (the tax collector )'s house where he was accused by the Pharisees of "acting cosy with crooks and riffraff".

He also had to answer questions from John the Baptist's followers & was confronted by a local official whose daughter had died, but on the way to his house he healed a woman 's haemorrhage when she touched his robe

After raising the little girl from the dead, he was approached by two blind men who were healed, & after that, Jesus gave the gift of speech to a man who was speechless.

Meanwhile all these healings upset the Pharisees, who accused Jesus of making a pact with the devil .

Jesus then made a circuit of all the towns and villages on the Lake where he taught and healed both broken bodies and hurt lives.

Jesus heart broke as he saw the crowd so confused and aimless.

And so the exciting story goes on & on .....and I have only looked at the first 9 chapters of Matthew out of a total of 28... You can see the tempo of Jesus' life was so great !

So Christmas may be so busy with cooking, shopping, wrapping gifts, erecting Christmas trees, hanging lights, writing cards ,making phone calls or

visits, and preparing meals or going out with friends and family

However all these things join together to produce a very joyous and peaceful Christmas and why...? Because God came down at Christmas to live among people, and to save them from their sins

Let us pray

Lord, we, thank you for the joyfulness of the Christmas season... For the Christmas carols and music... For simple pleasures..... for sending Christmas greetings ,family gatherings, visiting friends. We pray that our festivities and celebrations will not replace the manger scene in our lives.

We pray for Christian countries throughout the world as they juggle Christmas, with consumerism ...with discontent & need.....with war & violence.....with hunger and disease

We pray for all those Christians attempting to bring your message to those who have never fully understood the significance of the birth of Christ at Christmas time

We pray for a blessing on those people involved in attempting to give to people in need..... donations of food, clothing, money, essentials, gifts, & friendship and dignity

We pray for all our politicians who have a tremendous responsibility in caring for our nation, Australia... In making decisions, which have far reaching implications for now, and in the future. we pray that they will be honest and trustworthy in all that they do

We pray for our little church here at Caves Beach... We pray you will bless each person before You today ....We want to serve you in our community and in our giving. As we enter into our new mission next year, we pray for a suitable applicant for the position of a community worker. We pray for flexibility in the job description and in the applicant so that your spirit will guide and direct the whole process

We remember, all our members who are in care... Those who are ill... Those who are waiting for, or recovering from operations & Procedures... And those who have gone to live closer to relatives

We pray for all countries suffering the indignities and horrors of war.  
We look forward to a time when there will be no more wars or even rumours of wars... to the time when Satan's rule on earth is ended

Let us now sing together the perfect prayer ....the Lord's prayer:

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 745** Seek ye first the kingdom of God



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsBpM9IcBts>

## **BENEDICTION**

Mary sings her praises:

God lifts up the lowly.

Say yes, gladly, take your part,

as new life unfolds within

and all around us!

As you await the story

of Jesus' birth, to be told again soon,

may you know God with you,

Holy One, Holy Joy. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzpJ0rLtufA>