

# PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY GATHERING

16<sup>th</sup> November, 2022

Topic:

## *Christmas Stories*



# ORDER FOR WORSHIP

## *GATHERING*

### **Welcome and Introduction**

### **We light the candle**

One: God of creation, shaper of seas and stars  
of planets and of people

All: **Is here with us.**

One: The Spirit of Jesus, born in Bethlehem  
gurgling, crying, laid in a manger

All: **Is here with us.**

One: Breath of the universe  
flickering, dancing in the candle flame.

All: **Is here with us.**

*The candle is lit*

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We recognise and give thanks that we humans  
are creatures of the Earth, living in an ecosystem comprising  
flowers, trees and insects; land, waters and mountain ranges.  
We honour the Kurna people who were the first peoples to be custodians  
of this fragile ecosystem in which we now live.

## **Acknowledgement of Diversity**

We recognise our diversity, and in terms of the Uniting Church's Safe Church Policy, we acknowledge that this is a safe place in which all people can worship together, irrespective of race, creed, age, ability, sexuality, cultural background, or any other distinguishing feature.

## *CELEBRATING*

### **Celebration of Life**

One: As we approach Christmas,  
we give thanks for this opportunity to worship and to celebrate.

**All: May we be surrounded with a very real sense  
of 'peace to all' as we spend this time together.**

### **For Reflection**

One: Days of blazing sunlight, clear blue skies and sunbaked earth,  
colourful birds, fiery bottle brush, pastel jacaranda,  
the fragrance of each season beneath the Southern Cross...  
We offer our praise and thanks, for God is in our midst.

All: **May it be so.**

### **Wisdom from the World/Religious Traditions**

"Wisdom is not just special knowledge about something. Wisdom is a way of being, a way of inhabiting the world.

The beauty of wisdom is harmony, belonging and illumination of thought, action, heart and mind." (*John O'Donohue*)

One: With wonder we watch  
the world unfold before us each day.

**All: Prisms of light dance our dreams beyond our grasp  
and we awake to a world bursting with promise.**

One: Ordinary, simple things, bring awe and wonder to our everyday.

**All: And we find blessing all about us.**

One: May our minds ever ponder the subtle textures of life,

**All: And as these words and stories settle into our minds,  
may we feel them stir and lift our hearts. (Adapt. Gretta Vosper)**

## **Hymn: TiS 322 The North Wind**

### *EXPLORING*

**Scripture:** John 1:1-5 (*Modern Paraphrase*)

By Lloyd Geering

In the beginning there were no words and no names  
and the world was without shape, and void.

But the human species developed words,  
and that gave rise to thoughts, and to imagination.

Humans named the world;  
and wondered how they and the world had come into being.

They sensed a hidden power, for which they had many names.  
They believed the hidden power brought all things into being.

And then the hidden power revealed itself to a man, Jesus,  
full of grace and truth...

**Hymn: As we contemplate the birth of Jesus** Tune Irby TiS 312

As we contemplate the birth of Jesus,  
When we hold a baby in our arms,  
We are bathed in wonderful amazement  
At the thrill of infant charms;  
Jesus, as dependent child,  
Enters life quite undefiled.

As a youth, his parents taught him  
What was right and what was wrong;  
He knew pleasure and temptation;  
Through his struggles he grew strong;  
This young man brought into view  
Ancient wisdom for review.

He told stories, challenging yet simple  
Pointing to the reign of God;  
Pious leaders soon became opponents;  
They disliked his constant prod;  
Still he calls for justice, mercy;  
Sometimes breeding controversy.

We now look beyond the manger  
To a man of destiny;  
From his cross and by his presence  
We are called to ministry;  
With the love that he displayed  
God's great dream will never fade.

*George Stuart Used with permission*

## Presentation

### *'Christmas Stories'*

Sermon preached at Community Christian Church of Springfield, Missouri,  
by Rev Dr Roger Ray, 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2021

## Discussion

Discuss what aspects of the Biblical record might be historically accurate,  
and what might be 'stories'?

Roger Ray says 'the Bible is to be taken seriously, but not literally'. Do you agree?

*AFFIRMING*

## Christmas Beatitudes

v1 Blessed are those who are kind, especially when it's hard,

v2 Blessed are those angry for justice in situations of unfairness and oppression,

v3 Blessed are the compassionate in times of hatred,

All **Blessed are those who speak honestly and who seek truth when confronted by fake news,**

v1 Blessed are those who keep their courage in the face of belligerent bullies,

v2 Blessed are women who stand up to abusive men — and men who stand with them.

v3 Blessed are those who are different, with distinguishing features,

All **Blessed are black lives — and white lives who know that black lives matter,**

v1 Blessed are the earth and animals among those indifferent to their well-being,  
v2 Blessed are non-violent resisters whose enemies hope you will be violent  
v3 Blessed are you when people shake their heads because you refuse to accept authoritarian rulers as “normal,”

**All Blessed are you peacemakers who refuse cheap grace,  
You are daughters and sons of the Sacred,  
brothers and sisters of Jesus,  
friends of the Spirit, Salaam. Shalom. Peace.**

### **Hymn: Summer Christmas** (*Tune: 'Aurelia'*) TIS 457

We sing our Christmas carols amidst the summer heat,  
When scorching winds can torment those harvesting their wheat;  
We look for cooling respite, some shade among the trees,  
An evening change in weather, a light refreshing breeze.

The summer heat reminds us of drought and rainless days,  
Of hostile dust-storms raging, of forest trees ablaze;  
At times like these we question; we sometimes feel dismay;  
We need to sing our carols to celebrate this day.

This story of a baby, exposed to human fate,  
To summer heat and winter, to human love and hate;  
The Jesus story claims that we all can rise above  
Our disappointing failures to work the works of love.

We can be devastated by all the daily news,  
By murders, wars and conflicts, by pessimistic views;  
But in the Jesus story we ponder on the worth  
Of love, compassion, beauty, the hope of peace on earth.

So Christmas has a message of dreaming and good cheer;  
When God's intention prompts us both now and every year,  
In summer and in winter to emulate with joy  
The life we see in Jesus - this tiny baby boy.

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## *SCATTERING*

### **Parting Words**

One: Mysterious God, confounding our expectations,  
meeting us where we least expect to find you...

All: **Stay with us now.**

One: Child of the manger, sharing our weakness...

All: **Stay with us now.**

One: Stay with us in our frailty,  
stay with us on our journey...

All: **Walk beside us, live within us,  
lead us home. Amen. May it be so!**

*The candle is extinguished*

### Notices

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