

Sunday December 25, 2020

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Song – Angels from the Realms of Glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ImNs1E7xSM>

1. Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.
 - *Refrain:*
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.
2. Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
Yonder shines the infant light:
3. Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen His natal star.
4. Saints, before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear;
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In His temple shall appear.
5. Sinners, wrung with true repentance,
Doomed for guilt to endless pains,
Justice now revokes the sentence,
Mercy calls you; break your chains.

Bible Reading – Luke 1:26-56 (NIV)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.' ³⁴ 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' ³⁵ The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.' ³⁸ 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

⁴⁶ And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up

the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants for ever, just as he promised our ancestors.'

Announcements

- **School Holidays:** With NSW Schools now being on holidays for their Christmas break, many of the activities of our Church also go into recess. Many thanks to those who helped out with Sparklers, Kids Church, SYBS, IMPACT, PWA, Living Long and Loving It, Home Groups as well as all those who were on any of our rosters. Well done good and faithful servants.
- **Christmas Break:** We do see the Christmas break as a very important lull in a very busy year. So please do take a good break from things. But don't take a break from God! Please try to spend time with him each day and come to worship each Sunday whether here or while you are away! This time of year can be incredibly important to recharge our spiritual batteries, so please make the most of the summer break.
- **Sheets for children.** There is no kids Church today but we will be providing activity packs for primary school kids and below.
- **TEAR:** Every year we encourage people to think about those less fortunate than yourself at Christmas time. With COVID restrictions still in place we are unable to hand out TEAR envelopes nor receive a retiring offering for their annual Christmas appeal. Could we encourage you to go their website and make a donation instead? It might be a little harder for us to give this year but the need may even be greater than normal.
- **Rhema.** Do you realise that our Church produces a radio programme each Sunday morning at 7:30am on Rhema 99.7? It's called God's Word for God's World. Why not check it out sometime?
- **Accommodation Needed.** One of our regulars at 9:15am needs accommodation soon after Christmas. Can you help? Please talk to Stephen.

Kids Talk – Quizworx <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1sDsaTw96OYya9B4LTm6MUJFj7EDCTC8z>

Carol – Away in a manger https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MYqIRIJ0hY

1. *Away in a manger
No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down His sweet head
The stars in the sky
Look down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay*
2. *The cattle are lowing
The poor Baby wakes
But little Lord Jesus
No crying He makes
I love Thee, Lord Jesus
Look down from the sky
And stay by my side
'Til morning is nigh*

3. *Be near me, Lord Jesus
I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever
And love me, I pray
Bless all the dear children
In Thy tender care
And take us to Heaven
To live with Thee there*

Prayer Points

- Praise God for His wonderful plan of salvation available through Jesus Christ
- Give thanks for all the good things that God has given us this year.
- Pray for a reduction in the spread of COVID-19
- Pray that a vaccine might go to all people regardless of nationality, age, religion or wealth
- Pray for our missionaries. Christmas is a time where they feel isolated from their friends and family. Especially this year with the travel restrictions worldwide.
- Pray for those who are struggling this year with loss, loneliness, depression or a broken heart.
- Pray that people might put their trust in Jesus today.

Video – Christmas told through Google, Facebook etc

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QE2Qk88yUZ0>

Carol – O Holy Night

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOiEtZwP1H0>

1. O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;
Chorus
Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.
O night, O holy night, O night divine.
2. Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming;
With glowing hearts by his cradle we stand:
So, led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from Orient land,
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials born to be our friend;
Chorus
He knows our need, To our weakness no stranger!
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King! your King! before him bend!

3. Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is Love and His gospel is Peace;
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease,
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful Chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise his Holy name!

Chorus

Christ is the Lord, then ever! ever praise we!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!

Bible Reading – Luke 2:1-20 (NIV)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to 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. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.' ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Sermon – A vaccine for Christmas

<https://youtu.be/ou72qEo-Tdo>

This year COVID-19 came from nowhere and changed everything. My family were looking forward to a long service leave holiday in Canada and America. Saving up for it for 5 years. Planning for the last year. Everything booked & paid for and then suddenly nothing. And even now 9 months after it was cancelled, I am still fighting to get much of my money back.

But for you it might not have been a holiday but a lost job. Or you had to move back to your parents' place in order to pay the bills. Or you have struggled with school work or uni work or work online. Or maybe it was the social distancing. Or your struggles with your own mental health. Or you couldn't see your family interstate or overseas. Or your loved ones were isolated from you in nursing home or hospitals. Or the fear of actually getting COVID yourself.

Slide 2

And the answer long term for us all is a vaccine. So, all at once over 200 groups starting looking for a solution. Looking for a way to get our lives back to normal. A way to return to the world that we knew and

loved. Except I think for many of us COVID made us stop and wonder is that really the world that we want to go back to?

A world of extreme climate and bushfires. Pollution and bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef. Materialism and the pursuit of more and more things. Extreme busyness, stress, anxiety. The never getting anywhere treadmill? When we stopped, when we were forced to stop, many of us in a way breathed a sigh of relief. Before we got anxious again because we didn't want to go back to the old normal. We don't even know we want to find in a new normal.

Recently I received a Christmas email from a friend saying to me they are not looking forward to next year, even with a vaccine fast approaching, because life wasn't OK before and they see no hope of it being OK in 2021. It got me thinking what we need is not just a Vaccine for COVID-19 but a vaccine for life itself.

Slide 3

So, if that is what you feel, I have good news for you today. Hope is on its way. A vaccine was developed many years ago that has proved not just 90% effective but 100% effective. For its three main ingredients are hope, joy and peace. And it is a vaccine that is administered to us when we come to grips with the Jesus story that we are presented with at Christmas time. The big pharmaceuticals haven't found the magic formula but God our Creator is offering to give us all a free jab today. Because the one who will give us this vaccine is his son Jesus.

Slide 4

Now you may have heard the Jesus story before but you have to admit it is truly astonishing. Something that has been part of the bedrock of Western culture for over 2000 years and yet a story that most people think today is highly improbable. A story you might file just to the left of the Easter bunny & slightly to the right of the tooth family. But if by some miracle, some Christmas miracle you could grasp this story today I assure you that it would bring you

Slide 5

1. Hope (Luke 1:46-55)

And let's be honest hope is in short supply at the moment. It must be manufactured in China and stuck in some Australia Post warehouse. In his book *Man's Search for meaning*, Victor Frankl, who followed Sigmund Freud at Vienna argued that the "the loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect on man(kind)." As he looked at the experiences of men caught up in concentration camps in WW2 he discovered "any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal.

Slide 6

We all need hope in the future. And Christmas gives us that sort of hope in spades. When an angel appeared to Mary in or about 3BC, Mary was greatly troubled. ³⁰*"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end."*

Hope comes to Mary through God sending her a King. Someone who could change the situation. Someone who would rule not in their own way but in God's way. Someone whose kingdom would never end. And when he rules what does this King bring to his subjects?

Slide 7

Mary catches a glimpse of what that kingdom would look like and so she sings a song of hope. And although the things that are being promised to Mary are in the future, she speaks as if they have already happened. Because if God has started this process by sending his Son into Mary's womb then the rest of his promises are as good as done.

You see God "has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." God has not forgotten his people. He is personally involved with all humanity. God's greatness is not revealed in his isolation to us but in his intimacy with us. For he sends blessings. He reverses the status quo. He lifts up the humble and brings down the proud. He fills the hungry with good things. He helps his people. He remembers our state. And he promises to turn this world upside down.

That's why he is sending the world this baby. To bring in a new type of kingdom that will change everything. And it is this king that brings us hope. So, are you hungry, lonely, empty or feel forgotten today? Do you feel that this world has chewed you up and spat you out?

Slide 8

Then line up for the jab. Get the Christmas vaccine. Jesus coming into the world is not just business as usual. He comes to give you God's great gift of hope. And if you are full, happy, content then also line up for the jab. Because 2020 has shown us that life can change in an instant. And that most of what we thought would give us meaning in life doesn't actually give us meaning. Our only hope then comes in Jesus. But there is more to this vaccine than just hope there is also

Slide 9

2. Peace (Luke 2:14)

And that is something else that we all desperately need this Christmas. Because it seems that we are more divided than ever. Yes, there still continues to be wars fought in Albania, Afghanistan, North Africa and the Middle East. But there is more tension with China, and North Korea and Iran. And even in the most stable nations in the USA, France, Britain and Australia democracy is under severe pressure. We are fraying at the edges.

The American Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the middle of the American War of Independence lost his wife in a terrible incident and welcomed home his oldest son from the battlefield terribly injured; wrote these words on Christmas Day 1863, *"And in despair I bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I said; "For hate is strong, and mocks the song. Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

Slide 11

But that was the song that the angels sang at the birth of Jesus Christ. They appeared to the shepherds, those unclean people who were constantly living on the edge of society, and said ¹⁰*"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."* ¹³*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God & saying ¹⁴'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."*

Slide 12

Peace that is what all want. Peace on earth. Peace at home. At work. In society. Within ourselves. But how do we get that sort of peace? Well, when a cyclone comes hurtling towards land it causes havoc and chaos above the surface but just 10 metres below the water, the fish go on living completely unaware of the carnage going on above. You see there is a deeper solution to the chaos of this world. Peace comes from a deep relationship with the God of peace. Peace with God is the starting point for peace on God's earth.

Slide 13

And Jesus is the one that brings both of those things to us as a Christmas gift. He knocks down the barrier between us and God which our sin had built up. He demolishes the walls that we constructed to keep others out by enabling grace, love and forgiveness to flow to us from God and from us in God's strength. So, join me as we line up for a jab of peace. It too is a part of God's Christmas vaccine. Let this baby grow up as a man. And die on the cross to forgive your sins. That will bring you peace with God and peace within yourself and over time peace with others. Hope and peace and lastly

Slide 14

3. Joy (Luke 2:8-20)

This is the big one isn't it? This is the sugar hit that we all want at Christmas time. The joy of holidays. The joy of family and friends. The joy of plenty of presents. And yet the Christmas period rarely delivers the joy it promises. Because we so often put our trust in people to make us happy. Or worse still we put our trust in material things.

Slide 15

A while back the Australian Psychology Association website posted this comment "*We're living through an epidemic of over consumption, materialism, debt, waste and stress.*" Interesting that they used the word epidemic isn't it? But the post was pointing out that we are addicted to buying more stuff. Whereas psychological studies over and over again prove that materialism doesn't produce happiness. But produces depression and anxiety instead.

Slide 16

And if Christmas is all about consumption and family and food no wonder it fails to bring about any deep-seated joy. But here the angels are saying the shepherds that coming to Jesus will bring them joy. ¹⁰ "*But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.*" ¹¹ "*Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*"

And so, the shepherds go to Bethlehem and they bow the knee at the new born king and they come back full of joy. ²⁰ "*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*" They had found their joy in Jesus! And they wanted to spread that Joy to those around them. Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

Joy comes through knowing that God has come into the world, into our world. Hope comes that he is here to overturn our values and install God's chosen King Jesus. Peace comes when we make peace with God & admit that we have been his enemies and so ask for him to forgive us. All these come through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Who doesn't stay in a manger but ends up on the cross. Dying so that we might live. So that we might have his peace, his hope and his joy.

Slide 17

CS Lewis wrote a book which talked about his conversion entitled Surprised by Joy. When God's Joy came into his life it changed everything. Our Churches associate Jon Brown told us a few weeks ago when he became a Christian he walked to the beach and everything seemed to be now in technicolour. Life before was black and white but now he was simply overwhelmed by colour. And when I became a Christian 40 years ago during a Church outreach campaign called Spring 80, it changed my life.

It was a vaccine that has brought me 40 years of hope, 40 years of peace and 40 years of joy. In the midst of COVID and conflict. In both bull markets and bear markets. In times of loneliness and loveliness. This Christmas vaccine doesn't promise that the cyclones won't come but in the midst of the tough times it hides you in the depths of God's love and protects you from the very things that would steal away your hope and joy and peace.

Slide 18

But how do you know this is true? Don't just take my word for it. Don't just believe the word of other people in church today. Get the jab, the Christmas jab. Open your life to the work of King Jesus. Trust your uncertain future to the God who holds your future in his hands. Believe in Him. Trust in Him. Follow Him.

Slide 19

And what if the Christmas vaccine doesn't work? Well let me introduce you to the Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal and his famous wager. He says if God doesn't exist and the message of Christmas is false, you really have lost nothing. But if it is true and Jesus did come to the manger and go onto the cross then you have the chance to gain everything.

So, if I am wrong, keep looking for the right vaccine. But if I am right today you can find in Jesus Christ hope, peace and joy. Gifts from God to you through his son Jesus Christ. That's a wager I would bet my life upon. What about you?

Song – Joy to the World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzhCMwqn6OQ>

1. *Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.*
2. *Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*
3. *No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.*
4. *He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

Benediction – We wish you a Merry Christmas

We wish you a merry Christmas
We wish you a merry Christmas
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year
Good tidings we bring to you and your kin
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year

Good tidings we bring to you and your kin
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year