



Advent 2020

Invitation

Encouragement

Joy

Hope

Mt Carmel parishioners were invited to share their thoughts on the liturgical themes and readings for Advent 2020. These reflections, preserved in this booklet, also show how an extraordinary year has woven itself into our thoughts and our lives. It has been a challenging year, but these reflections show how, in the midst of these challenges, the **invitation**, **encouragement**, **joy** and **hope** that comes to us from God is not diminished.

The posters that were on display in the church, have been reproduced at the start of each of the themes. These were the creation of John Clarke whose funeral was held in the church on the beginning of Advent: Thursday December 3rd.





6pm Garry Montgomery

My reflections came from the chorus of "Come O Lord" by Marty Haugen.

Come O Lord, come to every heart -

Our need to engage our heart in the Christmas invitation. While we live in our heads, our lives miss the vital ingredient of compassion (love). When head and heart integrate, you have wisdom.

And waken all who sleep to your joy-

What would be the joy of God? To be welcomed into our lives, every part of them.

We are asleep when there is no understanding, no place, no interest in God being vitally involved in our daily lives.

O Emmanuel, come to my heart-

Emmanuel, God is with us. We are never alone. God is intimately woven into the fabric of our living, as close as our breath.

Again, let us open our heads/ hearts, be awake to the Christmas invitation.

I still look for the joy your Christmas brings-

The good news of the incarnation but not just in Jesus. It's God's invitation to us.

And I would be your presence in the world-

God has no other hands but yours, no other ears but yours, no other feet but yours.

Our invitation- be Christ in the world.

8 30am Michael Barry

It strikes me that as we enter Advent this year, three different flavours of invitation are relevant.

The first is an invitation from God to us. It is at the heart of Christianity, and is well-trodden and familiar: an invitation to love our neighbour. There is nothing new here, but it doesn't make it any easier to live. We have many examples given to us in Scripture, including the parable of the Good Samaritan, which underscores for us that we cannot be choosy about who our neighbour is. Therein lies a challenge.

The second is an invitation from us to others. The invitation we might offer is for us to do absolutely nothing - except listen to others. Listen with present and compassionate ears to what our fellow humans are trying to say. Let them express themselves, share their feelings, anxieties, emotions or joy, or whatever they want to share. Put the phone away and be present - invite another to speak freely. Another challenge.

The third is an invitation from ourselves to ourselves. At the risk of dreaming up a first world problem, I do think that the end of this year, if any year, is a time to invite ourselves to go easy on ourselves. Things can be tough, different, difficult, uncertain- so let's invite ourselves to put the self-imposed expectations of perfection to one side, to be ok with not getting everything right all the time, and to be grateful for what we have in front of us here and now - in this present moment. There is beauty all around us in nature and of course the deepest beauty is of the human spirit. A self-directed invitation to see and love this beauty sounds easy to do, but might, at this particular moment, be the greatest challenge we face. If we can accept this third invitation, then maybe the first two will fall into place.

5.30 pm Tricia Ryan

I don't know about you, but I feel as if I've been 'alert' and keeping 'vigil' since midnight March 20





this year when the Australian International Borders were closed and we truly became an island unto ourselves.

We were invited to be alert about every aspect of our living – sanitizing our hands, protecting our face, our mouth, our nose, our eyes, maintaining distance from friend and stranger alike, avoiding possible contamination of surfaces and purchases, noting danger of public transport and work environments, cancelling holidays and trips, closing schools and working on-line. The list was endless. But as in the Gospel today the door-keeper was the one who was to be alert – during the night even – in case the ‘Master’/Virus returned, so our health officials and political leaders had to keep a constant twenty-four hour watch in order to warn us of any approach of the deadly Virus. And what a wonderful job of keeping awake they have done and are doing for us.

These past 9 months or so have been truly an Advent time:

Further though, these months have been, in the words of the prophet Isaiah in today’s first reading, a time of urgent invitation from us to God.

‘O that you would tear open the heavens and come down’, O that you would return for the sake of the tribes of your inheritance, O that at your Presence the mountains would melt (this virus would go away) O that we could be reassured that you are indeed the potter and we are the work of your hand. O that you would protect us from this world-wild calamity!

Come Lord Jesus!

But what about this week-end? What about us today?

After so much alertness and waiting, watching and keeping vigil, how can we approach anew this liturgical Advent season during this never before experienced seismic shift in reality? What is actually the difference for which we are

preparing as we continue to wait for things to return to ‘normal’?

The answer lies in the Gospel of this Sunday We are invited to attend to ‘timely living’. The master “has gone from home and left the servants in charge, each with their own task.”

We are to be aware of our own task. We have to be careful for if we are not attentive we run the risk of failing to recognise God here and now in the work we do, the people we meet and the situation in which we find ourself. Last week’s Gospel revealed this inattention, ‘when did we see you hungry and thirsty, sick or naked?’

We run the risk of waiting to live in a future where there is no Covid, no hand sanitizer and no masks and forgetting to live today as it is – Covid, hand sanitizer and masks notwithstanding. We are invited through today’s reading to approach this Advent through the lens of a vigil of hope where we are invited and called to recognise God’s coming right now and in the most unlikely ways.

So as the carols ring out around the shopping centres watch out, be alert. You never know the time when God will come to you.



6pm Ben Norris

Getting Our House in Order

Good evening friends, fellow parishioners.

I have been asked to offer a short reflection on today’s readings from the 2nd Sunday of Advent.





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As you can see, this weekend we are focusing on the theme of Encouragement.

There is strong encouragement from today's readings for us to Prepare for the coming of the Lord, who will lead the people of Israel out of exile and back home like a Shepherd.

The Prophet Isaiah encourages his people to Prepare for the Lord, make straight your paths, basically getting your lives for this time when the Shepherd King will bring you home.

Similarly, in the second reading, Peter encourages the nascent Christian community to be every ready for the coming of the Messiah, who could come at any time, indeed like a thief in the night, so best to be alert and ready

In the Gospel, John the Baptist encourages his followers to repent and to be prepared for the One who will follow him, the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit. As Brendan Byrne the Jesuit theologian states, 'Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus will reclaim human lives from all the captivities (sin, ignorance, disease etc), that hold them bound and draw them into his own life-giving intimacy with God. This is the meaning of baptising with the Spirit'.

As some of you might be aware, Lolita and I became first time grandparents about two and half months ago to an adorable little girl, Elizabeth. Our daughter and son in law have been living with us since returning from a European holiday in February this year, with COVID restrictions etc. In the months leading up to the birth we basically re-arranged our whole living arrangements in the house, giving up our media room and en-suite over to the new parents. We were determined to create an environment that was comfortable, convenient and safe for the new baby. The preparation involved was epic, with friends being called in to move stuff around and modify a long existing house set up.

And we went through all this effort for a little baby, just like the readings are asking you to try

to prepare for the arrival of The Baby, the Saviour of the World. Every re-arrangement of furniture was done to ensure that the living space was going to be the best it could be to look after a baby.

What in your life needs a bit of shifting or a bit of re-arranging to make room for Jesus to occupy prime position in your life? What stuff needs to get recycled, donated to Vinnie's. What stuff do you need to purchase? Just like we got a lot of help from friends to assist with the internal shifting, you too can have access to the Holy Spirit for a bit of guidance and often a bit of extra spiritual muscle if an area of change requires a bit of heavy lifting.

So my friends, as we begin the countdown to the birth of Christ, spend a little time preparing a space in your life where Jesus will become the centre of attention. Decorate your nursery with humility and mercy and ask the Holy Spirit to bring a little peace to your heart, so that little baby Jesus can be comfortable there.

8.30am Chris Harkin

'Prepare a way for the Lord' – Mark 1:3

So now we are on to the second week of Advent, and the theme for this week is Encouragement. To me, the word courage doesn't only just mean 'brave' - it comes from the Latin word 'cor' meaning 'heart'. And in French the word is 'coeur'. So when someone encourages me or I encourage them, we are giving heart or a depth of meaning to our lives.

The readings of Advent pick up and reiterate themes which are common to us all over the years. I have heard these themes so often before, but how fresh can this message be for me today? Can I really hear these words with fresh ears and respond with a renewed heart?

Advent is a time of waiting and preparation for the coming of the Lord. Just as we ready ourselves for the coming of important visitors to our homes, we prepare, we clean, we discuss





what we might eat and drink. In fact, we celebrate and give heart to others through our preparations.

Isaiah's reading is one of excitement calling us to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Isaiah doesn't give any indication as to when the Lord might be coming, and we are still waiting. And John the Baptizer heightens the expectation in today's Gospel saying 'someone is following me, and he is more powerful than I am'. It almost sounds as though the Lord is about to arrive at any tick of the clock.

I can so easily recall tiny voices from the backseat of my car forty odd years ago saying: 'Daddy, are we there yet?' Similarly, just like those little voices of my children, I am asking in my mind 'is the Lord coming soon?' Peter answers me in the second reading and makes me even more frustrated when he tells me that a day for the Lord can mean a thousand years and vice versa in human terms.

I don't know about you but I am somewhat impatient when I'm waiting, but it is then that I become particularly conscious of people whose lives are in distress while waiting; for those experiencing the dense fog of grief, waiting for the results of medical diagnoses, those who are hungry, homeless, jobless, victims of abuse, refugees, or in prison. For anyone suffering great distress, waiting is difficult let alone trying to encounter the Lord or allowing an openness to Jesus encountering them. I have been with some of these people. I've been there myself. Writing about Advent a couple of years ago Pope Francis encouraged those in distress to allow 'the joy of faith to slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust'.

I enjoy reading scriptural passages but have sometimes thought of it as a big tease. I have to admit though that it forces me to think a bit deeper and realise that God's time is not my time. As I mentioned before, Peter said that a day for the Lord can be a thousand years in our time schedule. He points out that God is so patient,

loves us so much, wants no-one to be lost, and accordingly encourages us to clean up our acts, and his final compassionate statement is encouraging us to simply 'do our best' to change our way of life.

In the spirit of Advent being a time of waiting and Encouragement, I just want to finish with a question: 'Who's doing the waiting here? Is it me doing the waiting, or is it God doing the waiting, giving us every chance to get our act into gear?'

5.30pm Anne McKenny

Good evening Everyone,

If we haven't had the opportunity to meet, I've been a parishioner at Mt Carmel since the late nineties and enjoy the warmth, talents and vigour of this community, the gentleness of the Carmelites and the contemporary vision for how we express and nurture our faith.

Sharing a reflection for this second week in Advent with a theme on Encouragement is a good fit for my background in the noble profession of teaching. Whether I've been directly responsible for students, teachers or working with school leaders – encouragement has always been central to how I think and act. The mission of a Catholic teacher is to enable all learners to become the best version of themselves – as God creates us to be.

As we enter the second week of Advent, bringing this extraordinary year to a close, we contemplate what the coming of Christ means to us. In doing so, I offer some perspective through a quote from Buddha:

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared with what lies within us.

As Christians we believe Christ is within us.

A school principal that I work closely with has a beautiful expression about encouraging our students to be responsible, confident, active





learners who contribute to the world – with Christ as their centre.

And if Christ is our centre, what lies within us is Love because Christ is Love. Remembering the hymn I sang as a school girl..... They will know we are Christian by our Love.

Today's Scripture readings remind us that God is becoming one with us in flesh and God's coming to us is that of a child who shows us a way and that way is of love, sacrifice, and justice.

As we prepare our way to celebrate Christ coming to us and being within us, what would your response be, if asked, "What is within you, today?" What would you say: I am too busy to know, I am weary, a little anxious? Would you say excitement, anticipation, overwhelmed? Is it grief for a love one departed or absent? Is it gratitude, generosity or simply content with life as it is?

If your response could be fully recognising - we are who we are - with Christ as our centre, then a response could be, I am Love. We would know from the writing from St Paul... if you are love...

You are patient, you are kind. You are not jealous, pompous, inflated and you are not rude.

You do not seek your own interests, you are not quick tempered, you do not brood over injury.

You do not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoice with the truth.

You bear all things, you believe all things, hope all things and endure all things.

With love as your centre, you never fail.

I encourage you to take Love as your centre, I encourage Love to be your way, as we prepare and await the joy of Christmas in the weeks to come.



6pm David Hutton

Good evening everyone. Let me begin with a question: are you feeling joyful tonight? Or when was the last time you felt joyful? I don't know about you, but 'joy' is not a word I use much. I suspect most of us don't bounce into breakfast or come home from work announcing, 'I feel joyful'. Perhaps it's due to our understated Australian style.

I think we might sometimes say we are 'happy' which is the closest we get to being full of joy. And we might well ask 'What is there to be joyful about given the year we've had?' Perhaps it's been a really tough year for you or those close to you – illness, grief, anxiety, separation from loved ones or financial worries. It's certainly in some way been an unusual and challenging year for nearly everyone.

But the readings for today are full of joy. As we heard, the first reading from Isaiah said, 'I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God'. Our response today was 'My soul rejoices in my God'. The second reading from Thessalonians exhorts us to 'Be happy at all times.

Hence the name for this Third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday – Gaudete being the Latin for 'rejoice'. In both Lent and Advent, which are times of reflection, repentance and preparation for major feasts, the Church gives us a little break about halfway through from the more sombre readings and tells us there is much to be joyful about. The message is 'Hang in there. There is a lot to look forward to. We are nearly there!' And





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did you notice that we have a rose-coloured candle, rather than a purple one in our Advent Wreath, to mark this Sunday – rose being a celebratory colour. It may look pink, but I assure you it's really rose.

So what does give us cause for joy? Well, we look forward with anticipation to the coming of the Child Jesus at Christmas. The importance of Christmas is that we celebrate that our God so loved us that God's only son was sent to show us how to live as authentic human beings. God didn't deliver a handbook of rules or a constitution for the church, not even stone tablets. But rather sent a child who would by his words and actions show us how to live. These words and actions became stories to help us understand his message – both the stories about Jesus and the stories, we call them parables, that Jesus told. They are, of course, the gospels and they are best way we can get to know and understand Jesus.

The gospels invite us to be Jesus people who promote the reign of God in our world through being people of love, peace, courage, justice and peace. They also tell us that it might not be easy. We may face opposition and injustice as Jesus did. But we believe in the ultimate triumph of good over evil, life over death. But that's Easter - so let's not get ahead of ourselves. We haven't got to Christmas yet.

So, getting back to joy, we might ask - what leads us to be joyful or happy people? Obviously true joy is not about a superficial happiness, although we all need times of pleasure and fun in life. Nothing wrong with that. Psychologists tell us that we can't really be happy in the deep sense of that word by pursuing happiness for its own sake.

Rather, true happiness is a by-product of how we act. That is, by moving out from ourselves towards others we will develop a more satisfying life. It sounds a lot like the Jesus message doesn't it? Pope Francis summarised it well when he said, 'An authentic faith always involves a deep desire

to leave this earth a better place than we found it'.

So, our joy is in knowing that our lives are held in God's loving embrace and that we are called to share that joy with others. As we approach the great feast of the Christ Child, how might we share the joy? Every Christmas the St Vincent de Society at Mt Carmel invites us to donate to their Christmas Appeal. Charities tell us they are having a lot more calls than usual for support this unusual year. For those of us who are in a position to do so, Vinnies or another charity of your choice, would be a good way to share the joy this Christmas, perhaps by donating a little more than usual.

There's an old joke that if Christians are saved, why don't they look saved. So, as we journey through Advent towards the end of this challenging year, let's tell our faces that we are saved and find ways to share the joy with those we meet.

8 30am Paul Asnicar

There is a centuries-old hymn which is often sung in Advent that is full of longing and lament, with a melody that conveys heartache. I'll sing you a bit – I invite you to listen closely to the words:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appears*

As we know, the song goes on to exclaim rejoice, rejoice – but why? We get a feeling that this joy is somehow wrapped up with Israel, exile, being captive, and this strange word – 'Emmanuel.' It all seems elusive, but I think that the joy that arises comes from understanding all these things within a grand narrative; one that the first century Christians understood, and saw themselves a part of. And it is understanding this story that leads Paul to rejoice and be thankful while he is in chains and in prison – a joy not dependent on his circumstances. It is what calls





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forth Mary's great song of praise that we read today.

So this morning I'd like to touch on only a couple of elements of this grand narrative that I think Scripture tries to convey to us, and have also been discoveries for me.

First, some background. Leading up to the time of Jesus, Israel felt itself to be in exile. 500 years before Jesus, Israel fell to the Babylonians. They were marched off to Babylon, and Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. We find it hard to appreciate the enormity of this. When they were allowed to return long after, they were conquered by the Greeks through Alexander the Great. Then they were invaded by Rome. Even though they were back in the promised land – they had no peace, no Shalom. Oh, how Israel longed for return from exile and for a messiah to deliver the Shalom that Isaiah speaks of in the first reading. They longed for the presence of God to return to them – but instead they felt like they were still in exile in their own land. This is where it gets interesting – because Israel wanted a political and military leader – but we know that something far more unexpected and wonderful awaited them. What God does is not anticipated by Israel even though there are hints of it in the prophets. More than provide a political leader to kick out the Romans, God restores the very presence of God to Israel – but God's presence is no longer confined to the ark of the Covenant or the Temple. It is this story that brings the joy that erupts from Mary and Paul in our readings.

And all good stories have a beginning – so let's start there. If I were to ask you which book of the bible starts with "*In the beginning*," you would probably think of Genesis – "In the beginning, God..." right?

But there is another book in the bible that starts with "*In the beginning*" – John's Gospel, from which we get today's reading. Can you imagine how bold and audacious this would have sounded like to the first century Israelites? John, are you

really sitting down to write a new Genesis? There are many clues that John is intending to write a new creation account.

As we have seen, John starts with the words "In the beginning." But look what happens next.

In Genesis it says "In the beginning, God said..." God speaks creation into existence with his word. In John's Gospel, we have "In the beginning, the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus, as the Word of God was right there in creation – and John leaves you in no doubt: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made," says John.

And the first thing that God creates in Genesis – is light. And what do we have in today's reading and all through John's Gospel – that Jesus is "the Light!" This gives us a clue to what John is trying to tell us – that not only by him all things were created – but that Jesus himself is the beginning of New Creation.

To understand John's Gospel, therefore, we need to understand Genesis as the ancients meant it to be read. The key to understanding Genesis, I propose, is that it is based on the ancient Mesopotamian practices of Temple inauguration, but in a way that subverts this to tell a different story. Ancient temple inauguration ceremonies took seven days – and on day six of these ceremonies there was an image of God placed in the temple – where the presence of God met with humanity. The Jewish scriptures turns this on its head – because instead of people being slaves to the Gods as the Mesopotamians thought – the image of God was to be found in humanity itself, man and woman. And all of creation – the cosmos - is a temple. We were meant to represent God to creation, and creation to God.

This is what John is bearing witness to – he is telling a story about something that has





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happened in which heaven and earth have come together in a whole new way. He is telling this story of creation and new creation in terms of the fulfilment of the divine purpose in, for, and through Israel. He is telling a story of *new creation*, the renewal of the present world. God's promise is to flood creation with his presence – for heaven and earth to not be separate, but for them to come together as Isaiah tells us.

Friends – where have heaven and earth met? Where has God's will been *done on earth as it is in heaven*? In the true man and true God – Jesus.

This is the joy that Israel and the world starts to understand with the coming of Jesus. This is why heaven and nature sing of this cosmic joy – *Joy to the world*.

John, the writer of the Gospel today – wants you to know this joy – that the word that was there in Genesis – is the word that becomes flesh and tabernacles with us. Us!!

John wants you to know that all the promises of Genesis and beyond have come to fulfilment – not through Adam – but through a new template, and identity, for humanity. In Genesis, God breathes life into Adam and Eve, but John's Gospel has Jesus, who is life, breathing on his disciples and saying receive the Holy Spirit. We have become the Temple of God – announcing New Creation to the world.

In Genesis, we have mankind appearing on the sixth Day. In John, we have Pilate declaring – “Behold the Man” on the sixth day. Not Adam, but Jesus – no longer a mere image – but very God placed in the cosmic Temple. On the seventh day - God rests - and Jesus rests in the tomb after saying, It is finished. And then... and then!... on the first day of the week - new creation begins. No longer is the Temple needed – God's presence is with Israel and with us as the new Temple of God. God is reconciling all of creation to himself through Jesus.

And how does this new creation get announced? Not through kings and power structures – but to a young girl who says yes to God.

And what does this new king announce? – that the promises long made to Israel through Isaiah will start to be seen – not through power or the sword – but that the poor are given Good news; that hearts that are broken are bound up; that liberty is proclaimed to captives, and freedom to those in prison. When we do these things, we announce new creation.

And I proclaim to you - Rejoice, Rejoice – Emmanuel – God is with us – he has not only ransomed Israel – but freed all of creation from bondage – he has free us from Sin and Death. No wonder Mary bursts forth in praise and rejoicing. No wonder Paul exhorts us to rejoice and be thankful in all circumstances. They knew their place in this great cosmic drama – and by their witness, so do we, which is why we, along with heaven and earth, can sing of this cosmic joy – *Joy to the World, the Lord is come – let earth receive her King*.

5 30pm Sam Hill

The evangelist of today's Gospel presents John the Baptist who as we know is a dominant figure throughout the advent readings. His purpose is to remind us of what we're on about. Why we are called to rejoice? It is his prophetic voice that cries out in the wilderness and not just the natural wilderness, but in that interior wilderness that loses sight of the presence of God in the same way the people of Israel had. John is calling them back into a complete and full relationship with the creator. That same prophetic voice is what you and I are called to use and bear witness to. The voice or the message that we proclaim is not always comfortable message.

In the first reading, Isaiah says, he has been sent to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. The year of Jubilee. The year of justice and restitution. The year that Isaiah tells he has come to proclaim is a year of challenge and a demand for liberation for





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those who have the power, whether that power be civil, economic, or religious. For these people, it's a year that disturbs an unsettles the status quo. Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. The second reading again calls us into a challenge. A challenge of recognizing and giving thanks for all things. How difficult is that at times?

What are we able to give thanks for over the last 12 months? So many things have happened, so many things have occurred, covid-19 has influenced our whole being, our whole existence. Where in the last 12 months can we look back and see the joy and give thanks? Personally this year – although difficult being away from family and friends with border lockdowns, there has been much joy. I've seen family and friends embrace technology with face time, online gatherings and games nights and even virtual meals together. Working from home allowed parents to spend more time with children, embracing afternoon walks and bike rides and helping them with their schooling. For the young ones it will be a time that they will never forget, having their parents present. There has been the joy of restrictions easing, allowing sports to be played, restaurants to open, borders reopening and of course a return to being able to gather together in community for worship. The list goes on as we reflect back. So How can we give thanks? That's the challenge, even in the uncomfortable times.

In today's Gospel, the Pharisees and other religious leaders, don't come to John because they wanted to hear about his message or accept the message, But they wanted to prove whether he had the right to deliver it. John's call to baptism of repentance is a direct challenge to them. They are the authorities. They know the mind of God. It's not for some little upstart in the wilderness without their years of education to tell them what they're doing wrong. The Pharisees and others could not be further from the truth. Because it's precisely the role of the prophet to

speak the words that will shake the structures of their society to their very foundations. Just as the child of Bethlehem will grow to do the same.

Just because the person claims to be a prophet does not mean they are. The prophet's words must be verified by the sense of the faithful, by the way, they call us from our comfortable lives out into the wilderness. Where we search for God. And God searches for us. Often the words of the prophets will be mediated to us by others who hear and understand it, even when we might not. Again, the mediators must be tested in the same way as the prophets must be tested to ensure that it is the authentic word of the prophet that is being mediated and not some distortion of it.

A priest friend of mine often tells the story of primary school students coming over to the church to learn about the signs and symbols of the church as part of their RE class. the priest shares about the various signs and symbols around the place, the tabernacle, altar, baptismal font, stations of the cross etc. at the end of the class He asks the children what they think is the most important symbol in the church and a young chap puts up his hand and points to the Exit Sign above the entrance. The priest thinks smart kid, one in every class however he challenges the kid as to why he sees the exit sign as important. The kid shares that the sign reminds him that when we walk through those doors out into the world, we need to practice what we learn in here. Smart kid.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the coming of God into our lives through Jesus, we need also to remind ourselves that we have been called to be the means to bring Jesus into other people's lives. We like John the Baptist are called to be the ones who will bring Jesus into the lives of others in the same way that those who have been instrumental in building our community brought Jesus into our lives. May we take the example put before us of John the Baptist as one who was sent by God, as we are, to be a witness,





as we are, and to point out Christ, as we also strive to do as we bring the joy of knowing Christ to all we encounter.



6pm Mark Sayer

We have been witnessing a drama unfold during the first three weeks of Advent. It began with our being jolted into awareness: “Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come.” Then we are reminded by Mark’s gospel in the second week, of Isaiah’s prophecy that a messenger will be sent before us, one who will prepare a way for the Lord”. The third week of Advent is highly prophetic, and reminds us of the calls of Isaiah, Mary and then John the Baptist. Mary’s Magnificat, from Luke’s Gospel is used as the responsorial psalm, the only time in the year when a Gospel passage is used as the response, as opposed to the Old Testament Book of Psalms. It begs the question of who we might think a prophet might be. Great characters like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and John the Baptist might spring to mind. Interestingly, when one reads about how most of these great prophets were called to act, we realise they were quite flawed or ordinary human beings. Moses was a murderer, Isaiah thought himself wicked and unworthy, Jeremiah thought he was too young, too immature. Yet they were the ones that God called.

Mary’s call begins with the angel announcing to her: “Rejoice, you who enjoy God’s favour! the Lord is with you.” Obviously, Mary, although young, has led a very faithful life, and while she is just as obviously rattled by the angel’s

announcement that she is to conceive a son who is to be named Jesus and will be called Son of the Most High, she is somehow able to take breath and put her trust in God. She declares, “Let it be done unto me according to your word”. Mary’s being rattled at the start of this encounter is a signal to me that she didn’t have tickets on herself about being supremely worthy - she was “deeply disturbed by these words”, the Scripture tells us, the literary way of saying she was gobsmacked, deeply shaken – just like all those earlier prophets were. I wonder what this is saying to all of us, here and now in 2020?

The word “prophet” can be a little misleading, and often we think it means foretelling the future, when, in fact, the scriptural use of the word refers to those called by God to be faithful to the covenant. Often, it meant calling people back to faithfulness and standing up to the misguided ways that had become prevalent.

God always works in human ways, and works through ordinary human people, not people like the superheroes of celluloid reality. Ordinary, flawed people who somehow were able to trust in their God to support them in the mission they were called to – people just like us, in fact.

“Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” says Moses (and he had murdered an Egyptian!).

“The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me”, says Isaiah.

“Do not say, ‘I am a child’. do not be afraid of confronting them, for I am with you to rescue you’, Yahweh declares to Jeremiah.

“I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your Word”, says Mary.

St Teresa of Avila’s prayer, says it all:

*Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.*





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Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

One thing we know about Mary is that when she set out to do something, she followed through. After her encounter with the angel, she did not sit around in the glow of how important she might be, but she set out straight away to go to her cousin Elizabeth's aid during her pregnancy. Her outlook was always outwards, to others and their needs.

Mary, and the other prophets before her, give us an enormous challenge to bear witness to our God, to be faithful to God, by the actions of our lives. Our values and beliefs are proven by what we do, not by what we just say. Author Tim Winton is quoted as saying, "Let your life be your witness."

In my work with parents of adolescents over many years, there have been moments when they have reflected on the good people that their children have become, often despite some adversity. My response is to let them know that it doesn't happen by accident. Their efforts to be good parents bears fruit. If God works in human ways, then it is no accident that Jesus turns out to be a pretty impressive person. Mary says to God's Messenger: "Let it be done unto me according to your word". Later in the same Gospel, Jesus prays to his Father in the Garden of Olives, "However, not my will, but yours be done." Jesus didn't have some Godly microchip implanted in him. Mary and Joseph formed him, encouraged him, loved him into the man he became, teaching him how to listen to his God. Jesus was fully human.

In the very early weeks of Fr Janu's joining our community, I was one of several who assisted him to gather some tools and equipment for one of his manifest skills: his woodworking ability. Wayne and he had worked out that the storeroom below Wayne's office could be a good space to turn into his workshop, and I offered to

help him clear out the space which was filled with the disintegrating accumulations of many years. I picked up very quickly that one of his favourite mottos is, "Just do it!" He doesn't dilly dally around but just hops in and gets things done, and that extends to much more than just his beautiful woodworking.

I think that we're blessed here at Mt Carmel by the active presence of a number of prophets, in that scriptural sense, who inspire us with their leadership. So, in the words of one of our resident prophets, and interpreting what Mary's example calls us to follow: "Just do it!"

8 30am Catherine Allen

This fourth week of Advent has the theme of Hope. Hope is borne of Faith and Faith is borne of Love and Love encourages Charity. Mary had each of these - Faith, Hope, Love and Charity. It is difficult to imagine how any of us might respond to the suggestion that we were going to experience something physically impossible and bound to bring about judgment and, by some, condemnation. It is perhaps even more difficult to imagine graciously agreeing to this. This was Mary's predicament. Despite the fear that she naturally would have felt, she overcame this and agreed to the plan God had for her.

Humbled she proceeded into territory no other human had ever ventured. There with God's Grace she lived.

These 3 intangibles of Faith, Hope and Love make our lives complete. Whilst we may not be able to touch them or define them absolutely, we all know how we feel when they are compromised. Lives with any of these lacking might feel like lives not fully experienced. We can function, we can exist quite well, but we are not experiencing life in all its fullness and beauty.

Love makes our hearts sing, Faith sates our souls and Hope allows us to action Charity and to persevere to make things better and be better.





Hope is our desire for something with the expectation of receiving it.

Today's theme of Hope is particularly relevant this year; a year that started with natural disasters here in Australia, and was then engulfed in the COVID-19 global pandemic.

I will share something that links to today's theme.

We have all heard the saying 'half glass full and half glass empty'. There is also the story of the child who responded with, 'I didn't order a glass of anything. I ordered a chicken burger'. What!

Well in this year of pervasive challenges the world has been forced to pivot; to rethink the way we do things, produce things, support ventures and embrace strengths and harness hope.

We have benefited from those who have 'ordered chicken burgers', who have thought outside the box, who have responded to the challenges hopefully.

In God gifting us his son, Jesus, in humanity, as one of us here on earth, He thought outside the box.

Many ridiculed the suggestion, thought it was blasphemy, too 'out there' to possibly be true. There didn't seem to be anything tangible or believable in this happening. & yet it did.

We look forward to remembering and celebrating this on Christmas Day. Jesus is the Hope of Christmas.

Those who, like Mary, had implicit Faith in God, Faith borne of Love and trust in the Hope that Jesus was God as the prophets had foretold hundreds of years before, embraced Jesus, celebrated and looked forward to His teachings, His guidance and modelling of how to live life as God planned; to push ourselves to be our best and to help create a greater good for all. Jesus came so that all who believed in Him would have eternal life. What a gift; a gift we are physically

reminded of at Christmas, and one we receive at Baptism and commit to following in Eucharist.

Reminders of this exist all around us at this time of year.

A wreath is said to represent the thorns worn by Jesus when he was crucified, the red berries the drops of His blood.

The white of the candy cane represents purity and the red, Jesus' blood, the cane the shape of the Good Shepherd's staff

Mistletoe survives by attaching itself to a tree, therefore the symbolism is that humans exist only by attaching themselves to God

Tinsel is said to ensure that darkness has no power in this important season. That hope exists for all.

In Jesus we are gifted the Hope of eternal life. This life we are living is part of our journey to a wondrous, eternal life, wrapped in Love, always hopeful that we can make a difference and live as God designed us each to live; hoping for divine union and eternal happiness.

When we place our trust in the God of Hope we are filled with joy and peace and look forward to eternal life. Our greatest gifts.

Let's all embrace Hope and look towards a very merry Christmas, filled with the virtues of faith, hope and charity and wrapped up in love.

5 30pm Jane Connolly

Invitation, encouragement, and joy. These have been the themes explored thus far in the readings for Advent.

This week's theme is that of hope. Now as one who loved anything to do with the English language at school, in contemplating hope, my mind clicked immediately into grammar mode. I wonder how many of us remember the joys of derivation, syntax, parsing, identifying parts of speech. Those who do will know that hope is





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both a noun – something tangible, and a verb – something we do. We are probably very familiar with the present participle hoping and the adjectives hopeless and hopeful. I love the image of the phrase hope filled.

Google tells us that the word hope is mentioned in the bible up to 182 times. That's about half the number of times that the phrase "Do not be afraid" appears, which in my mind is another way of saying be hopeful. Hope is not mentioned in any of today's readings and yet while the word is not mentioned each of the readings is abundantly hope filled, especially I suggest, that of the Gospel. For the first time in this Advent season we get around to the business of Jesus' birth, or at least his conception. In the Gospel we clearly hear the phrase "Do not be afraid".

Imagine the scene described there. We're in small town named Nazareth in an unimportant country named Palestine. We meet Mary, a teenage, unmarried, simple Jewish girl going about her daily tasks when an angel appears to her and says, "*You have found favour with God. you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*"

Now I am not sure how you would cope with such an event, but I know that in spite of the words I would be very afraid, very confused, and hope would be the last thing to fill my mind.

And so it was with this young, uneducated, unmarried woman, who at first shrinks back, she's frightened, she's upset. She knows who she is, a simple maiden in a small town, nothing more, nothing less. She is a girl with no influence, power, or status. She asks a question, not one of doubt but rather of clarification. 'How can this come about...?' In other words, 'If this is to happen, what am I to do, given the circumstances

of my life?' Her question shows a heart which is open, courageous, and accepting. She knows that by saying yes her whole life will be irrevocably changed. And knowing this, what does she do?

There's no need for a spoiler alert here as we all know the end of this story and have just heard its retelling. The end of this particular story becomes the beginning of another. The beginning of that great story which has brought hope to millions through the millennia.

And we are amongst that number for here we are, still gathering to hear and celebrate this transformative story of the birth of Jesus. And we do it I suggest because with the birth of the Christ child, the incarnation, God with us, the great gift of Christmas is revealed as hope for the world.

In a year in which our world has been challenged, hope is needed as never before. Pope Francis reminds us that *The Lord never abandons us; He accompanies us through the events of our lives to help us discover the meaning of the journey, the meaning of everyday life, to give us courage when we are under duress or when we suffer. In the midst of life's storms, God always extends His hand to us and frees us from threats.*

Such is hope. This is what Mary knew, this is what she said yes to. As we enter into the next few days, let's try to be more like her and no matter the syntax, no matter how we experience it, let us be open to the hope of Christmas so that it may fill our hearts

