



Leura Uniting Church
28 November 2021
Rev Dr Mel Macarthur

Lighting of the Advent Candle. (Lorraine & Stephen White)

Advent Week 1

Watch and wait for Christ's coming!

Hear these words from the prophet Jeremiah:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

We light this candle in hope.

Light 1 blue candle

Let us pray...

God of hope, we ask that you prepare our bodies, prepare our minds, and prepare our hearts for your coming to this world. Take root, grow within us, and blossom for all to see. Your kingdom come; your will be done. Amen.

Advent Response

O Come, O Come Emmanuel (verse 1) TiS 265

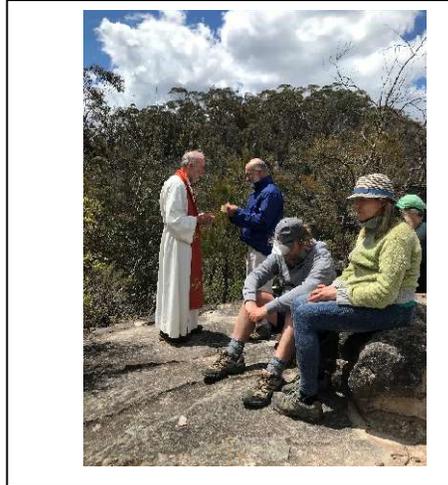
O Come, O come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

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Acknowledgement of Country.





Hymn. 268

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
 Let earth receive its king;
 Let every heart prepare him room,
 And heaven and nature sing,
 And heaven and nature sing,
 And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

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

Joy to the earth! The saviour reigns;
 Let us our songs employ;
 While fields and streams, rocks, hills and
 plains
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

CCLI Song # 2856405
 Isaac Watts

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Prayer of Adoration: Delma. *Journey of the Magi*. T.S.Eliot.

Prayer of Confession

O, God, we confess the blindness that is not even aware of sinning;
 the pride that dares not admit that it is wrong;
 the selfishness that can see nothing but its own will;
 the righteousness that knows no fault;
 the callousness that has ceased to care;
 the defiance that does not regret its own sins;
 the evasion that always tries to make excuses;
 the coldness of heart that is too hardened to repent.
 God, we are sinners; be merciful to us.

AMEN

Reading: Annie: Jeremiah 33: 14-16.

Reading: Deborah: Luke: 21: 25-36.

Hymn. 272

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
 Born to set thy people free,
 From our fears and sins release us,
 Let us find our rest in thee.

Born thy people to deliver,
 Born a child and yet a king,
 Born to reign in us for ever,
 Now thy gracious kingdom bring.

Israel's strength and consolation,
 Hope of all the earth thou art;
 Dear desire of every nation,
 Joy of every longing heart.

By thine own eternal Spirit
 Rile in all our hearts alone;
 By thine all-sufficient merit
 Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Sermon. Luke 21: 25-37.

The reading from the Gospel was brought to mind when I was asked, by an old friend of mine, to join an organisation called 'Extinction Rebellion'. My friend is very protest oriented.

I declined the offer.

He wasn't about to take no for an answer, at least without some resistance. I was pressed to give my reasons. I cited some of their protest activities. I explained that I had no desire to glue myself to a road as I felt that, with road rage so prevalent, this activity was not in accord with their principle of avoiding extinction, mine in particular. I was on a roll then and I suggested that their protest involving splashing paint over Parliament House in Canberra (the best architectural effort since the Opera House in my opinion) was the act of Philistines and I could not possibly associate with an organisation that condoned that sort of act. He was still unconvinced.

I produced my trump card. I suggested that they would need to change their name for me to countenance joining, as I did not think the human race was headed to extinction, at least not in the way that he was suggesting.

He then surprised me when he mentioned that there is reference in the bible to the Apocalypse. It was surprising to me because he has no religious affiliations or beliefs. He commented that it should be incumbent on me to '*rage, rage against the dying of the light*' as the poet Dylan Thomas would have it.

My friend seemed to equate his secular idea of the Apocalypse with a biblical Apocalypse. An Apocalypse is an Apocalypse, as far as he was concerned. I then wondered whether what he was talking about when he used the word was the same phenomenon as Luke was talking about in the passage we have just read. My friend associated the word Apocalypse with extinction, at least extinction of the human race. Luke associates it with heaven and earth passing away. Luke's account has the sound of finality about it. Both my friend and Luke exhibit an 'apocalyptic frame' of mind, albeit coming from polemical perspectives.

Sometimes there is a vast chasm between religious writings and writings emanating from the secular world. However, in the area of Apocalypse there seems to be an increasing interest from both religious and secular writings frame of mind, there has been what seems to me to be a remarkable congruence. It seems to me that there is an increasing emphasis given to Apocalypse, in both religious and secular writing. The question here is, are my friend and Luke talking about the same, future phenomenon when they refer to Apocalypse. In other words, **Are they on the same page?**

To illustrate this point, I turn to that great philosopher of the nineteenth century: Humpty Dumpty, who contested a point with Alice in Lewis Carroll's wonderful book; *in the direction of secular writers referring to Alice* is contesting the hotly disputed question of un-birthday presents: (Quote)

Now, back to Apocalypse. Apocalypse was once seen as the province of a few people with particular religious views of the world. Now the pendulum seems to be swinging the other way and secular writers are heavily represented.

Just before the first lockdown, whenever that was, I attended a seminar at the university. The university's largest auditorium was completely packed out, and at least as many people could not gain admission. This is not a common happening for the University. The topic? *Choose your own Apocalypse*. With such a fetching title as that I could not help firing up the computer and booking my seat.

At this seminar, four academics representing climate science, agriculture, epidemiology and physics/astronomy gave their version of Apocalypse. While we were waiting for the presentations multiple video clips were being shown Bruce Willis saving the world from various apocalyptic situations. Highly amusing and possibly meant to soften the verdicts of the presenters to follow. All these were quite pessimistic, for their versions of Apocalypse seemed to suggest foreboding about ongoing misery for some, (the majority) of people, rather than the extinction of the human species, (the province of propagandists, I would think). The astronomer was the exception however, he suggested that if an asteroid the size of say, Mount Solitary, collided with earth (a very slight possibility) then it would be 'all over rover'. But, 'despair not' he said, there would be some warning, which would give us opportunity to work out what to do with the last hours of our lives.

The audience was given the opportunity to vote. The results overwhelmingly favoured the global warming person and the agricultural scientist, with a narrow victory to the climate scientist. I was more than surprised that nuclear fusion was not a choice put forward on the agenda of the seminar. Without that addition to the agenda, the discussion was rather limited in its scope and the conclusions of the speakers seriously truncated.

All the presenters had a rather pessimistic view of likely events and were certainly plausible. That is a secular version of Apocalypse. What about the religious/biblical version? We have yet another encounter with Apocalypse in today's reading from Luke. The question that arises is 'Are the secular and biblical accounts just different perspectives/interpretations of the same phenomena'?

In answer to the question, are these secular and religious views accounts of the same phenomena. It would appear not, if we accept the views put forward at the seminar I have mentioned, where the views presented were foreboding of great suffering, but were not in any way suggestive that 'heaven and earth would pass away'. The accounts of the speakers, apart from the astronomer, all suggest an evolving situation and one that is certainly limited to the terrestrial. The biblical account in Luke has **an immediacy** and a strong element of surprise and ultimacy about it. Most importantly, our seminar speakers gave no cause for optimism, while Luke, writing about the Apocalypse, has the events heralding a redemption that is drawing nigh. Nothing of the sort emanated from the seminar presenters. Luke's account also has people 'fainting with fear and foreboding for what is coming upon the world' our presenters gave an account that saddened me, but did not send shivers up my spine. The biblical and secular accounts share the word Apocalypse, however what they are referring to in terms of content and meaning are widely different. So, do words mean what we want them to mean, as Humpty Dumpty asserts? I think not.

This can be summed up in my advice to my friend, namely that I could be persuaded to join Extinction Rebellion, if and only if, they better thought through the original meaning of the word Apocalypse and its referents, and rebranded themselves accordingly. Dropping 'Extinction' from their title would be a good start.

Well, I haven't become a member of Extinction Rebellion and my friend has not become a devotee of the biblical accounts of Apocalypse, however as climate change begins to bite I can imagine such exchanges such as these becoming more prevalent. Perhaps we need to keep Apocalypse to the forefront of our minds. **AMEN**

Hymn. TiS 301

The first nowell the angels did say
 Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as
 they lay,
 In fields where they lay keeping their sheep
 On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the king of Israel.

When they looked up they saw a star
 Shining in the east, beyond them far,
 And to the earth it gave great light
 And so it continued both day and night
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the king of Israel.

And by the light of that same star
 Three wise men came from country far;
 To seek for a king was their intent,
 And to follow the star wherever it went.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the king of Israel.

This star drew nigh to the north-west;
 Over Bethlehem it took its rest,
 And there it did both stop and stay
 Right over the place where Jesus lay.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the king of Israel.

Now let us all with one accord
 Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
 Who has made heaven and earth from
 naught,
 And with his blood salvation bought.
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the king of Israel.

Anon
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Notices. (John)

Offering.

Christmas Bowl (Perce)

Prayers of the People. (Annie)

God of Advent we come before you now in prayer. May we have a real sense of your presence as we bring our prayers, our thanksgiving and our requests to you, and enable us to open our hearts and minds to you.

We give thanks that we live in a country where we can worship you freely. We give thanks for technology and for Paul who has been enabling us to meet as a community by Zoom and we wait in anticipation until the time we can meet again in person.

We are reminded that today begins the season of Advent. This season gives us opportunity to slow down and spend time reflecting on the true meaning of Christmas. Help us come to an appreciation of "holy waiting." Be with us Emmanuel throughout this Advent season and draw us ever closer as we journey together toward the stable and the birth of Jesus Christ.

God of Hope and Promise.....hear our prayer

Almighty God, it is your will that all nations should live in harmony and understanding with one another. We ask you to look mercifully upon our world. We pray for those nations where there is corrupt power, war, poverty, racial hatred and human suffering. We pray for women and children trafficked into slavery, that on-going international efforts to abolish human slavery will secure their freedom. We pray for people trying to rebuild their lives after the experience of abuse or violence, that they may know the intimate love of God.

We pray especially for leaders as they return from the Glasgow Climate Change conference that they be moved to make wise decisions to protect our planet and its inhabitants. We pray for a global revolution of justice, that the needs of nations most disadvantaged by climate change and the COVID pandemic be met by the world community. May each one of us also contribute our share to conserving resources and caring for our environment.

We pray for the United Nations, the WHO and for our own political leaders Federal, State and Local, and all on whom rests great responsibility at the present time. Give them wisdom to make the right decisions, courage to fulfill them and perseverance to continue any of their efforts to establish peace and promote the welfare of all people.

We pray for the upcoming Local Council elections and pray that those elected will govern with integrity, wisdom and consideration of all people and our beautiful Mountains environment.

God of Peace and Justice.....hear our prayer

We lift up to you all church communities throughout the world, that they be channels of Advent hope and peace amid the anxieties of the world. We ask your blessing on all churches throughout the Mountains and our church community here at Leura. We ask your special strength for all ministers including our Minister, Myung Hwa Park in the busy days leading up to Christmas. We give thanks for all those in our church who have served faithfully in different ministries throughout this difficult year and we ask your peace to be with us all as we approach the busyness and commercialism of the Christmas season. Not all people find Christmas a merry time and we pray for the "Hard-To-Be-Merry" Christmas gathering here at church in December for those who find Christmas a difficult time. May we reach out in hospitality to those we know may be on their own this Christmas time.

The past 2 years have been particularly difficult in many different ways as we all face the effects of Covid 19 and the lockdowns. We pray for the continued safety of ourselves and those dear to us and for the recommencement of gathering together in person at next Sunday's service.

We thank you that within the family of our church we find friendship, acceptance and belonging and we are grateful for the prayers and support of Christian friends around us. The comfort of friendship and community gives us strength. As we find these joys in our own lives, may we give that joy to others, and may our thankfulness be expressed in deed as well as in word.

We pause now to remember and pray for those in our church community, as well as those on our hearts who are not well, or who are experiencing loss, grief, anxiety, fear or other difficulties in their lives.....

God of healing.....hear our prayer

God of Hope be with us during this season of Advent. May the light of the Advent candles brighten our minds and hearts to be steadfast in faith, joyful in hope and untiring in love, so that we are ready again to receive in true peace Jesus, the Light of the World. Amen.

Now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus gave us:

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
 And forgive us our sins
 As we forgive those who sin against us
 Save us from the times of trial
 And deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
 Now and forever. Amen

Hymn. Tis 304.

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
 Come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
 Come and behold him born the king of angels:

O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

True God of true God, Light of light eternal,
 Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
 Son of the Father, begotten, not created,

*O come let us adore him,
 O come let us adore him,
 O come let us adore him,
 Christ the Lord!*

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation'
 Sing all ye citizens of heaven above,
 Glory to God, glory in the highest,

*O come let us adore him,
 O come let us adore him,
 O come let us adore him,
 Christ the Lord!*

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
 Jesus, to thee be glory given;
 Word of the Father now in flesh appearing:

*O come let us adore him,
 O come let us adore him,
 O come let us adore him,
 Christ the Lord!*

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Blessing.