



Gladstone Uniting Church Interface

Christmas Day

25 December 2024

Welcome

Hello and welcome all to worship this morning. We extend a special welcome to all visitors to our Church today. May your time of worship be a blessed one.



Let us welcome God's bright
and shining morning star,
A child
born in a manger,
A son
sent to redeem the world,
A saviour
come to renew all things.
May his light shine on you,
May his light shine in you,
May his light shine through you,
The light of God's Christmas
star be with you,
in this season of new birth.

For the most up-to-date information on our church please remember
www.gladstoneuniting.org.au

Lectionary Bible Readings

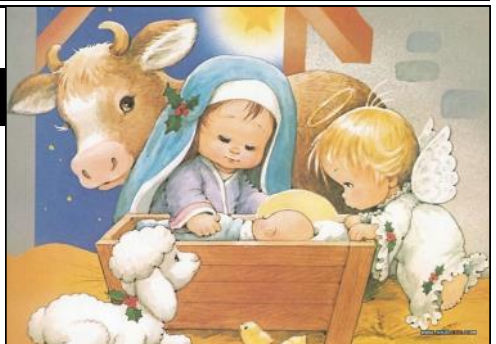
Christmas Day

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Psalms 96

Titus 2: 11-14

Luke 2: 1-14



Our Vision is for the Gladstone Region to be a community where everyone experiences the transforming love of Jesus.

The Guest Room

The journey had been long. Longer than they had expected. Joseph walked with measured steps, his eyes scanning the path ahead, while Mary shifted uncomfortably on the donkey. Her hands rested on her swollen belly, feeling the promise of new life stirring within.

Bethlehem was finally in sight, a collection of stone houses nestled among the hills. The city of David.

Joseph's family place. Yet, as they drew closer, doubt crept into Joseph's heart. He had family

here, but he hadn't seen them in years. Would they welcome them?

The streets were alive with people—distant relatives, travellers, and others forced to return by the decree of the emperor. It seemed everyone had come home at once.

Joseph stopped in front of a familiar door. He took a deep breath, glanced at Mary, and knocked.

The door creaked open, and a woman's face appeared. Recognition bloomed slowly, then turned to joy. "Joseph!" she exclaimed. "You've come home!"

"Yes," Joseph said, his voice tight with relief. "This is Mary. My wife."

The woman's eyes softened as she took in Mary's condition. "Come in, come in!" she urged. "The house is full, but we'll find a way."

They stepped inside. The air was thick with the scent of bread and the warmth of bodies. The guest room—what they called the *lishkah* (*kataluma* in Greek)—was crowded with relatives and other guests, so it wasn't much, but it was private enough for Mary and Joseph to settle in for the night.

For the first few days, they rested and tried to make themselves comfortable in the busy home. The noise of the other families—children running about, adults chatting and catching up—was a constant hum, but Mary and Joseph made do. The space wasn't large, but it was cozy enough for them. The women in the house, knowing that Mary was expecting soon, made sure she had everything she needed, offering help and companionship.

However, as the time drew near for Mary to give birth, it became clear that the tiny corner in the *lishkah* was no longer adequate. The bustle of the busy household and the lack of privacy made it difficult for Mary to focus on what was happening. The space was cramped, with just enough room for them to sleep, and now it was not the ideal place for childbirth.

When the labour began, Mary was moved downstairs to the lower level of the house, where the animals were kept. It wasn't a separate stable as we often picture, but rather part of the house that served as an area where animals could be brought in at night. It was quieter, more secluded, and offered the privacy Mary needed to give birth.

The women in the household, already prepared to assist Mary, went with her to the lower level for support. They helped her settle in, bringing blankets and warmth from the animals that gathered there. The men, on the other hand, remained upstairs in the living area, unaware of the intimate details of the birth but fully aware that something special was happening. They stayed engaged with the household activities, talking and waiting for news, while the women supported Mary through labour.

It was noisy in the house, with children playing and relatives talking, yet the cries of the newborn baby pierced the night. Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in the closest thing to a cradle — a manger, a feeding trough used by the animals, filled with fresh hay. The manger, while simple, provided a safe, secure place for the infant.



The sheep stirred and settled again. The house above was still bustling with noise. But in that humble space, love was born. The Light the world had waited for had arrived, not in a palace, not with fanfare, but in the place where the overlooked and the ordinary lived.

Meanwhile, outside the village, a group of shepherds kept watch over their flocks. Their world was the night sky and the rustle of sheep. Nobody paid them much attention — they were just shepherds, after all. But suddenly, the sky split open with a brilliance they couldn't comprehend. A messenger of God stood before them, and their hearts pounded with fear. "Don't be afraid," the angel said. "I bring you good news of great joy! A Saviour has been born to you in Bethlehem. You'll find him wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

As quickly as it began, the sky was filled with more angels, their voices ringing out in praise. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to those favoured by God!"

As suddenly as it had appeared, it was dark again. The shepherds blinked, their hearts still racing.

"Let's go to Bethlehem," one of them said. "Let's see this thing we've been told about."

They went in haste, their feet sure on the rocky paths. When they arrived, they found the house, the lower room, and the manger. And there, just as they were told, was the child. The Saviour. Wrapped in clothes, tiny and perfect.

The shepherds knelt, awe washing over them. The Light had come to them, the ignored, the forgotten, the ones who slept under the stars. They left that night, their voices loud with joy, telling anyone who would listen about what they had seen.

As the night settled again, the house grew quiet. Mary held the baby close, her heart whispering with wonder. The world didn't yet know. The rulers and the mighty were still asleep in their palaces. But the Light had begun to shine. In a humble room, among family and animals, in a manger meant for hay, love took its first breath. And nothing would ever be the same.

χάρις & ειρήνη - Հնրոհք եւ Խաղաղութիւն - Grace and Peace

Levon

The Colours of Christmas:

The colors most often associated with Christmas decorating are green, red,

white, blue, silver and gold. These colors have been used for centuries and, as with most traditions, the reason may be traced to religious beliefs. In this instance, green represents everlasting life, red represents the bloodline of Jesus Christ, blue represents the sky from which the angels appeared, white represents the purity of the Virgin Birth, and silver and gold represent the richness of God's blessings.



The Date of Christmas:

The idea to celebrate Christmas on December 25 originated in the 4th century. The Church wanted to eclipse the festivities of a rival pagan religion.

Romans celebrated the birthday of

their sun god, Mithras during this time of year. Although it was not popular, or even proper, to celebrate people's birthdays in those times, church leaders decided that in order to compete with the pagan celebration they would themselves order a festival in celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Although the actual season of Jesus' birth is thought to be in the spring, the date of December 25 was chosen as the official birthday celebration as Christ's Mass so that it would compete head on with the rival pagan celebration.





Celebrating 75 Years: A safe place to call home in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has been facing an overwhelming multitude of climate disasters. Our changing climate has meant that the country is experiencing more and more extreme weather events like droughts, floods and cyclones, putting many communities at risk of being forced from their homes. Currently, Zimbabwe is in the grip of the El Nino-induced drought which is wreaking havoc across southern Africa.

Jane's life was torn apart in 2019, when Cyclone Idai destroyed her village and took the lives of three her children. Severely injured with nowhere to go, she lived in an emergency tent for the next two years before the government finally relocated Jane and her baby, along with hundreds of other survivors, to a new location far away from her home. But when they arrived, there were very few resources available to them, and there was no access to water or healthcare.

"When the doctor told me that I had to go back home, I laughed and asked which home I was meant to go to because our homes were destroyed," Jane reflects.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) has been working with the community to improve their wellbeing, safety and dignity, and have been able to install a piped water scheme.

Before the scheme, women like Jane had to walk for miles every day, sometimes in the dark, which made it even harder for them to take care of their families and put their safety at risk. But thanks to ZCC, Jane can now access water near the safety of her home.

Jane is an active member in her community, helping displaced families to feel safe. She attended a workshop run by ZCC and is now trained in Community Based Protection, helping to identify and resolve child and gender-based violence in the community.

Santa Claus:

The original Santa Claus, St. Nicholas, was born in Turkey in the 4th century.

He was very pious from an early age, devoting his life to Christianity. He became widely known for his



generosity for the poor. But the Romans held him in contempt. He was imprisoned and tortured. But when Constantine became emperor of Rome, he allowed Nicholas to go free. Constantine became a Christian and convened the Council of Nicaea in 325. Nicholas was a delegate to the council. He is especially noted for his love of children and for his generosity. He is the patron saint of sailors, Sicily, Greece, and Russia. He is also, of course, the patron saint of children. The Dutch kept the legend of St. Nicholas alive. In 16th century Holland, Dutch children would place their wooden shoes by the hearth in hopes that they would be filled with a treat. The Dutch spelled St. Nicholas as Sint Nikolaas, which became corrupted to Sinterklaas, and finally, in Anglican, to Santa Claus. In 1822, Clement C. Moore composed his famous poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," which was later published as "The Night Before Christmas. Moore is credited with creating the modern image of Santa Claus as a jolly fat man in a red suit. However, his authorship is controversial. Some scholars suggest that it was Henry Livingston Jr. who wrote the poem.

25 December 2024

Preaching Levon Kardashian

Worship Lead-in Levon Kardashian

Notices & Prayers Levon Kardashian

Vestry Elders Delwyn Bambrick

Piano: Emily Field

Additional Music:

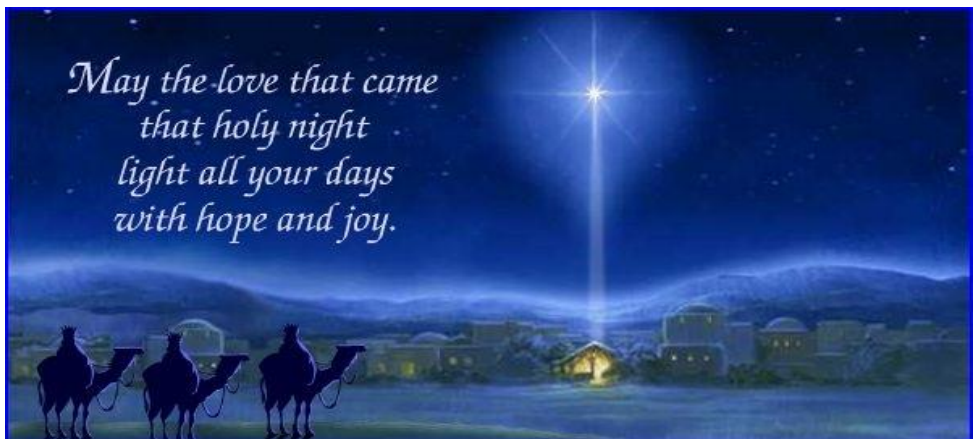
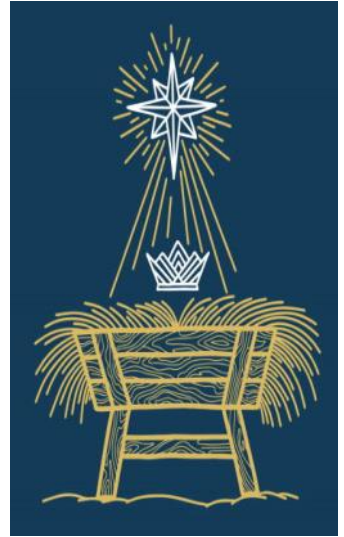
Singer: Ros Bambrick

Sound System:

Data Projector:

Bible Readings:

Guest Host/Valet: Linda & Ian Rippingale





Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.
Luke 2:11

The Birth of Jesus

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7 (KJV)

The puzzle is based on Luke 2:1-20



J B E T H L E H E M N G I H K
S A F P V T E N C D N Z B H H
F H A T Y F S O N B B D Q B J
A V E R E P D R K C A M G Z O
S S A P N P V U R I B G Q D S
E M D B H A E O I Z Y A K H E
L B X I C E I C E N S U S L P
S Q O H V V R B R O O M G R H
I M U R A N R D B S W S A R K
Y F E S N C A B S C H I L D R
C M A S L V A X F T E I S E G
A J H E S Q M E Z I Z L G K P
Y T G K Z I T G S C M N W R Y
A N G V W E A G J A A S R X G
A Z H X Y W Y H M M R S F F C

SAVIOR

CENSUS

MARY

MANGER

BORN

CAESAR

SON

JOSEPH

MESSIAH

ROOM

CHILD

SHEPHERDS

ANGEL

BETHEHEM

BABY

Dear Lord,

Like, the Magi of old, I come to worship You,
Like the Shepherds, I come to see You,
Like Mary, I ponder these things in my heart –
That You, God, would become a baby born in poverty,
Come to rescue us from darkness,
Come to bring healing to the hurting,
To bring justice to the downtrodden, and
To reconcile all things to You.

On this Christmas, my prayer is for the hurting, the
lonely,

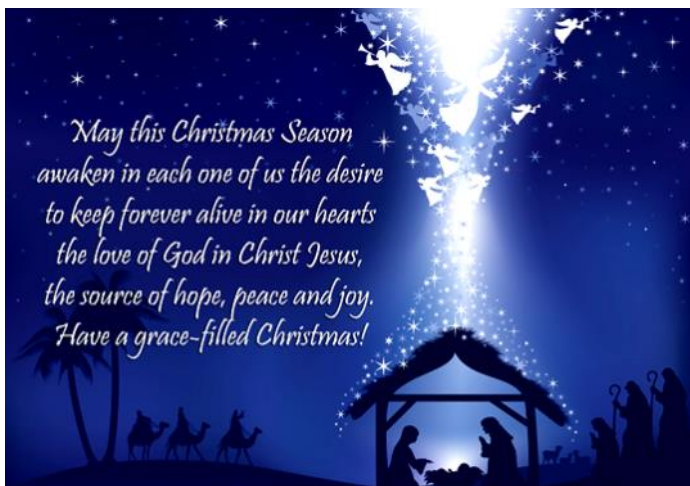
The physically sick and those who are sick deep in their
souls;

I pray that on this day when we celebrate Your birth,
That those of us who are hurting will be impressed
anew by Your scandalous love
That pursued us so far that You emptied Yourself and
became one of us.

Amen!



Thank you for coming to share our Christmas service with us. If you are visiting Gladstone, we hope that you have a very pleasant stay. If you live locally, we hope that we will see you again soon. May you all have a very blessed time this Christmas as we remember and celebrate the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Lord. And as Tiny Tim from, *A Christmas Carol*, said, "God bless us, every one."



*May this Christmas Season
awaken in each one of us the desire
to keep forever alive in our hearts
the love of God in Christ Jesus,
the source of hope, peace and joy.
Have a grace-filled Christmas!*