**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE CHRISTMAS 2B**

**1-3RD January 2021**

You may like to follow our service on our video. You may find it in our Worship Services page on our website at <https://www.macedonrangesunitingchurch.org.au/worship-services> or on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/0cVf-zovSgE>. Our service invites you to read the scriptures, pause, meditate and pray. Allow the stories told to lead you. We suggest reading the passages when suggested below. We are touching on several of the scripture readings in one way or another this week. If you would like to look at previous videos on our YouTube channel go to <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCb4hzdO-YgzmrIRVC-obyw>.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

We acknowledge all the Aboriginal Groups who have cared for and nurtured the land on which we meet: the Wurundjeri, Woi Wurruung, Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung. We acknowledge their leaders, past, present and emerging for it is in them that Australia’s future lies.

You are welcome here, as we reflect in different rooms and districts, States and Countries around the world, our spiritual connectedness through Christ Jesus, is remembered.

**WELCOME**

When we come into God’s presence, we can feel welcome, accepted and loved, regardless of all we have encountered this past year. As we come to worship on this first Sunday of the New Year. May you all remember that it is God who “makes all things new”. He is welcoming us, in all circumstances, so believe you are loved and valued. Welcome to you all.

**FOCUSSING AND DRAWING NEAR** *by Bruce Prewer*

We are here in the name of Christ Jesus.

*We are here to worship God.*

No one has ever seen God.

*Yet the only true Son, who lives in the heart of the Father,*

*this Jesus has made God known.*

The light of Christ Jesus be with you all.

O God hidden from our eyes,

Yet made knowable in Mary’s Holy son

Through him we approach you with confidence.

Let us begin this service with eagerness, continue it with open hearts, and end it with renewed courage.

In the name of Christ Jesus who with you and the Holy Spirit are worthy of our utmost love and praise and service.

AMEN

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION** *read by Wendy Hallinan*

On this first Sunday of the New Year, our readings call us to celebrate the God who bestows newness on wearied and burdened lives; who sets feet on new and level paths; who creates anew an environment to cherish and enjoy.

We hear the words and wonder – do they apply to us? To me? To this faith community?

Are we being called to let go of old ways and celebrate new ways of saying and doing and being?

Are we being called to be the ones who help others not to stumble; to bring comfort and consolation to those in distress; whose care for the environment is evident through our simple, and if necessary, sacrificial lifestyle?

We confess that there have been times in the past when we have failed to respond to such challenges; when our personal landscapes have too often become so full of “doing” that we fail to “be” there as comforters and healers of the pain of people and the land itself.

Merciful God, forgive our failure to hear your words addressed to us and our reluctance to respond even when we do hear them. Fill us with the refreshment and renewal that only you can give through the gracious gift of your Holy Spirit, that we may celebrate and respond to the promises and possibilities of this New Year with exhilaration and enthusiasm. In Jesus’ name, we pray.

AMEN

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Hear the good news, in Jesus Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.” And so I declare to you. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to god!

**BIBLE READINGS:** Jeremiah 31: 7-14, Psalm 147: 12-20, Ephesians 1:3-14

**JOHN 1: 1-18** *paraphrase by Bruce Prewer* © *1991*

In the beginning was the YES!

The YES was then with God

and was always

of God.

Before time-space, the YES was there;

without it no thing was

or ever could

become.

YES was the source of all things

and brought light and life

to earth patterned

beings.

In the darkness the YES always shines

outflanking fear.

Full of grace

and truth.

And this YES became a mortal

dear to God’s heart

yet truly one

with us.

Oh invisible YES we see you!

Though intangible

we touch you

and live!

**REFLECTION** for Sunday 3rd January 2021 Christmas 2 John 1:18

Which God do you worship?

I guess some of you are thinking what a dumb question that is, and would answer: “The one true God, of course!”

It is obvious to most of us that there can only be one true God. God may be given many different names in many different languages, and worship is expressed in diverse ways among many cultures, but behind it all there can only be one God.

So perhaps the question we should ask ourselves is: What is the nature, the essential character, of this one true God we worship?

What do we mean when we call God the Creator or Divine Judge or the Righteous One?

Can we explain what we mean when we call God the Holy One, Liberator, Ever-Present Spirit, even “Father” or “Mother” or the Mind-Purpose driving time and space?

Which God is it we worship? Can we describe this one true God in personal terms? For instance, is this God involved or uninvolved in creation? Caring or uncaring? Ruthless or compassionate? Dependable or capricious? Ethical or unethical? Vengeful or forgiving? Rigid or permissive? Bullying or nurturing?

Even though the Old Testament is a remarkable Book of enlightenment many of us struggle with some of the various ways God is portrayed in its pages and frequently find these incompatible with our own conception of the one true God.

But now turn to the rendition of the Prologue of John’s Gospel we heard earlier written by Bruce Prewer. It is a modern take on that very familiar passage at the beginning of John’s Gospel.

To my mind both do a pretty good job at capturing the essence of the one True God, particularly the final verse (18) which states:

*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.*

Here we have the simple, yet profound, truth that Jesus Christ totally determines the Christian definition of God. It is telling us if you want to see the nature of God, look on Jesus. The kind of God that God really is has been most surely revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, Mary’s Son, and the Christ of the church.

The season of Epiphany which means the unveiling of God, begins on Wednesday. This is pictorially expressed in the story of the three wise men coming from the East to worship Jesus and is a declaration that the God we worship is the God who has the nature of Jesus. This infant epiphany is climaxed years later, in a most amazing way, as Christ is nailed and left to die on a cross.

Nothing is plainer. Nothing is more complex. *No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.*

Today, many Christians are attempting to find new ways of talking about God in order to connect better with people who have little or no knowledge of the good news of Jesus Christ. One thing is sure. Whatever words we use must carry the qualities of God that are revealed by Jesus. The whole advent, teaching, healing, suffering, dying and rising of Jesus must radically shape and colour the “image” of God we hold in our heart and mind.

When we want to use the word “Father” it should be Jesus-shaped fatherhood - like the celebrating father in the story of the prodigal son and the father into whose hands the crucified Christ commits his spirit.

If we want to use a feminine word like “Mother” it must take its primary meaning from the one who welcomed and always had time for little children and outcasts alike.

When we want to use a word like “Friend” its meaning must flow from the One who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners, and from that “greater love” that “lays down his life for his friends” and his enemies.

When we want to call God “Divine Lover” we need to give it the quality of the gentle, fierce, costly, cross-carrying love of Christ.

When we prefer to think of God as Liberator, our concept of God must be drawn from the non-violent, self-giving of the One who “came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.”

God as Creator must be understood in the light of the Creator’s true Son.

God as Judge must take on the values and activities of the Man from Nazareth.

God as the Righteous One is defined by the righteousness of Jesus and Holiness by the quality of Christ’s “otherness”.

Even when we speak of the Holy Spirit we must not digress from the practical, loving charisma of Jesus.

The Mind-Purpose (beloved by cosmologists) at the genesis that caused the mega explosion which resulted in immeasurable stars and planets can only be understood and appreciated by being a humble learner in the school of Christ.

God is like Jesus. While not everyone will agree with that and some may call it blasphemy and even utter nonsense, for those of us who have been gathered into the healing, liberating, confronting, nurturing love of Christ, it is a Light exceeding all others.

God is like Jesus. Hallelujah!

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**

We give you thanks, O God, for revealing your love so fully in your Son, Jesus Christ, who not only came to this earth to redeem everyone, but also came to give us new life, his life in us. As we reflect on such gifts, we are reminded of the blessings foretold by prophets, and now experienced through the birth of Jesus. Blessings of refreshment and empowerment, blessings of comfort and peace, blessings of healing and hope. And as we give thanks for these blessings, we remember before you all those people who stumble still men, women and children who experience daily the violence of conflict in war-torn lands...

Refugees who find nothing to celebrate in this New Year…

People burdened by chronic illness and those who care for them…

Parents who worry about their children…

Families where relationships have broken down…

School leavers and others looking for employment, people who view the new year with a sense of hopelessness, uncertainty and fear may they know the blessings of empowerment and refreshment, of justice and peace and hope, of comfort and healing and dignity. Strengthen and guide us through this year to serve you as bearers of such blessings as we obey Christ’s commandment to love one another as he loves us. In His name we pray.

AMEN

**SENDING FORTH**

The Lord Jesus lives among us, making his dwelling place in our hearts.

May we go from this time of worship with the living Lord as our companion,

Our friend, and our servant, our motivator and encourager,

That we might, in love and grace, bring the presence of God

And the eternal word into our communities through our own words and deeds.

Go in faith to love and serve the Lord.

AMEN

**OFFERING**

You may like to consider giving an offering to your congregation via direct deposit. Details for each are:

* Gisborne: Gisborne branch, Bendigo bank, B.S.B. 633 108, A/C: 1512 83736
* Romsey: Bendigo Bank, B.S.B. 633 000, A/C: 161501200, Account name: UCA Romsey Uniting Church
* Mia Mia – Kyneton: Commonwealth bank, B.S.B. 063 517, Account no.: 1002 1775

*I will publish other congregation’s details as they come to hand. Contact you congregation’s treasurer for details if they are not here.*