**MACEDON RANGES PARTNERSHIP SERVICE – Epiphany 1b**

**8th – 10th January 2021**

You may like to follow our service on our video. You can find it on our Worship Services page on our website at <https://www.macedonrangesunitingchurch.org.au/worship-services> or on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/EOuYmcQ8VEM>.

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-oby_w>.

**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 began planning our worship for this week, we considered the idea of living in tumultuous times. Looming large in our minds was obviously the pandemic we are living through, and the new experiences it has brought to us. Little did we know that by the time we came to write and record this video that we would have seen and heard about unprecedented scenes in a Western democracy. The news from the United States is troubling, because it calls us to realise that peace and community cohesion are not guaranteed to us. We might have thought until now that the kinds of things happening in Washington only ever happened in countries vastly different from our own, but now we know that people that look a lot like you and me are capable of being agents of chaos.

With a deep awareness of the fragility of human constructs of peace, we come to worship this week. The readings focus us on the power of the living God; from the power evident in God’s voice as the instrument of Creation, to God’s power over the natural world, to God’s power expressed in the person of Jesus as God’s Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit as the One who, in turn, empowers us to live out God’s call.

We have entered the Church’s season of Epiphany, a time when we especially think about how God is revealed to us. As we gather for worship, whether near or far, together or apart, whether on Sunday or another time of the week, we open our hearts to the living God who is constantly revealing Godself to us. We come in hope, we come with awe and wonder, we come to worship…

**READ today’s Psalm, Psalm 29**

**PRAYER**

God, your voice went out across the darkness

and created all that is

Your voice goes out, and all the natural world

displays your mighty power

Your voice went out

when your Son was baptised

tearing the heavens, dissolving the distance

between you and your Creation

and heralding a new dawn

Your voice goes out

and we are called to respond

in love and gratitude

in service to your world.

As we gather to worship you

We stand in awe of all that you are

and all that you are capable of…..

We also acknowledge that we do not always listen

for your voice

That it can be easier for us to turn away or tune out,

and miss the call to join in your vision,

to live and work for a right-side-up world.

*A time of silence*

Forgive us, we pray

and help us to renew our commitment

to listen for your voice

in the magnificence

and in the minutiae of life

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Jesus Christ was baptised in the deep waters of death
so that we might be buried and raised with him
and have our sins washed away
in the depths of God’s mercy.
Sisters and Brothers, our sins are forgiven;
let’s be at peace.

**BIBLE READINGS:** Read today’s readings, Gen 1:1-15; Ps 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11. We focus on Mark 1 and Genesis 1 in our video reflection.

**REFLECTION** *by Rev. Peter Cannon*

There has been a great deal of reflection on the era in which we now live. Gen X, Gen Y, Millennials, Baby Boomers and Gen Me are all descriptions that are often perceived as less than complimentary. We are told we are now Post-Modern or even Post-Post-Modern. We are in the midst of a technological revolution but also a time of extremism. Social media breeds social bubbles where conspiracy theories flourish. As I record this, Washington in the US is in turmoil.

What an era! Uncertainty in the midst of the greatest accumulation of knowledge in history. Communication is literally at our fingertips.

Into this mix we add a Pandemic, climate change, distrust of science, political tribalism, international belligerence and self-interest. What do we make of it all? Where is God? Where is there hope?

It was also in a time of conflict, division and turmoil that Mark’s Gospel was written. It begins with a radical political statement, “the beginning of the *gospel (good news)* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Political? Yes, for it was Caesar who claimed to be the “good news” for his time. Mark is directly challenging Caesar’s claim by saying, “no, Jesus is the good news!”

Mark goes on to tell of the ministry of John, grounding it in the ancient prophetic tradition. Religion and politics are intimately entwined. The Spirit of God is promised to one in particular.

But twists within turns, in our passage, as no one witnesses the fulfilment of what John foretells – only Jesus. It is a mystery.

The story turns again and we are told the heavens are torn apart (v 10). The separation of heaven and earth is no more!

And the secret declaration by God, “you are my Son, the one I love. I am really pleased with you!” An event of cosmic significance – but obscured.

What can be said but, wow!

To Mark it is clear. To the readers also. But not to the original witnesses. They don’t recognise the epoch challenging events that are beginning in their midst. As happens so often in Mark, those who should know and see, miss out on understanding. Those who are thought to be on the outer, reveal deep insight.

So what for our time? Mark invites us back with the question, “to whom do you look for your good news?” Are we going to journey with the one loved and approved by God? Do we follow the path led by Jesus which challenges the way so much is done? Do we see beyond the obvious into the depths of God’s participation?

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**

Loving God,

In a world where many long to hear words of hope, love, justice, mercy, peace

Too often instead the words they hear are words of anger, hopelessness, hatred, injustice, fear and war.

May your voice be heard loudly and clearly in our world

Where there is chaos and darkness

May your voice of creativity and light be loud

Where there is violence and destruction

May your voice of resistance and rebuilding be loud

Where there is hunger and poverty

May your voice of abundance and generosity be loud

Where there is defeat and death

May your voice of renewal and abundant life be loud

And may we, your people

hear the call to thunder your life-giving words

into a world longing to hear them.

In the name of your living Word we pray. Amen

**THE LORD’S PRAYER**

You may wish to say the Lord’s Prayer in whichever version you prefer

**SONG:** Christ be our light (ATOK 313)

**SENDING OUT**

Who’s voice will you listen to as you go forward?

Where can you be God’s voice in the world this week?

How deeply will you seek God’s participation in your life

and in the communities in which you live this week?

As you ponder those questions,

may you know yourself to be blessed by the mighty God

whose power is beyond our comprehension

whose grace is beyond our merit

whose Spirit leads us into life beyond imagining

**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
* Lancefield: Account Name: Lancefield Uniting Church, BSB: 633 108, A/C No: 112926639
* 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.*