



'Worship at home' Sunday December 24th 2023



Today is the **fourth Sunday in Advent**,
and **Christmas Eve**. We wait with expectation
the celebration of the birth of Christ,
we reflect on the great love that God has for each of us;
love that comes to live among us
in the gift of a baby at Christmas.

Opening based on Psalm 89

I will sing about the wonders of your love forever, O God!
I will tell everyone I meet about your faithfulness
to all generations!

I will declare that your love stands firm,
that your faithfulness is as enduring as the heavens above!
Blessed are those who know you as their God,
for they walk in the light of your presence!

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**Reflect on your house or room:
how long have you lived there?
What makes it feel like 'home'?**

In western society, houses are important and those who are homeless are usually so because of financial hardship or difficult circumstances. However, some cultures are nomadic, and their houses are temporary, or portable. The Australian first peoples moved around the countryside, knowing where to make their home according to the seasons and cycles of the land. The ancient Israelites spent time wandering in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. During this time, they carried with them the Ark of the Covenant, a visual reminder of God's presence with them wherever they were. Once they settled in Israel, they built a temple in Jerusalem in which to house the Ark of the Covenant. However, God cannot be contained in a house, a building or a temple. When we try to contain God in a physical place, we

sometimes forget that God is present in all things and in all places. Sometimes we think of God as only with us when we are in church or when we pray, rather than knowing that God is with us in every aspect of our lives. **God is always present wherever the people of God are.**

Some hundreds of years after the temple in Jerusalem was built (then destroyed and rebuilt), a young woman found herself expecting a child, and an angel told her to call the baby Emmanuel. The name means ‘**God with us**’. In a very powerful way this baby showed us God in human form, breaking open the limitations of our expectations. God does not only live in a house, a temple or a church, nor does God only live in heaven or some spiritual realm: **God dwells with us, in every aspect of our lives.**



Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him

Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

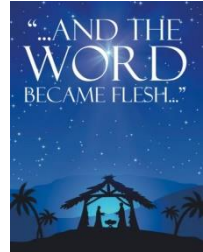
"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to

conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered.

"May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. *New International Version*

Reflect on the ways in which you experience the presence of God in your life.

In the Christmas story, we find God coming to live among us, in the coming of the baby Jesus, born to the teenage Mary. The presence of God was seen in the world in human form.



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

John 1:14,18

There is a story of a little boy who was frightened one night during a big thunderstorm. Terrified, he called out from his room, "Daddy, I am scared!" His father, not wanting to get out of bed, called back, "Don't worry, son. God loves you and will take care of you." There was a moment of silence. Then the little boy said, "I know God loves me, but right now, I need somebody who has skin on."



*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.*

Christina Georgina Rossetti 1830-94

The word "love" does not appear in any of the Scriptural tellings of the Christmas story. However, the birth of Jesus Christ was a turning point of time, revealing the amazing depth of God's love and grace for us. The coming of Christ fulfilled the promise of God's presence with us always, and brings hope for a time when God's reign of love will be realised in all its fullness, and the world will be transformed. This is the good news that the Christmas

story brings us, and exactly what we and our world need to hear this year, and every year. This is the story of Emmanuel, God with us, who came to dwell among us, living alongside us in all the messiness and pain of the world. Jesus Christ showed us “God with skin on”. Jesus Christ showed God’s love to be generous, unconditional, sacrificial. As followers of Christ, we are then called to love others in the same way. We are to be “God with skin on” to others.

1 John 4: selected verses

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God... This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we

also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.

New International Version



Who do you show love to at Christmas?

Are there others who you could include in your hospitality and giving this Christmas?

Who are those around you who most need the gift of love at Christmas time?

Pray for each of these people.

Closing

*May the love that created heaven and earth and all humanity come and live among us this Christmas. *May the love that overcomes suffering and hatred come and live among us this Christmas. *May the love that forgives and renews come and live among us this Christmas. *May the love that transforms the brokenness of our world come and live among us this Christmas. *And may we bear that love to all those we meet, this Christmas and always. Amen.