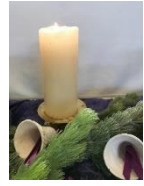




'Worship at home' Sunday December 31st 2023



As we worship today,
we continue to celebrate the birth of the Jesus,
and the ongoing presence of Christ in the world.
We give thanks for God's work in our lives over the past year,
and anticipate with hope the year that is to come.

**Do you still have Christmas reminders such as
decorations and cards visible around your home?**

When will you pack them away?

The celebration of Christmas is over for another year, and although some of us like to keep the nostalgia of Christmas going for as long as we can, others are happy to pack up and move on to whatever is next – perhaps enjoying summer holidays, making jam from an overload of fruit, or stocking up on Easter eggs, which are already available in the shops! However we are reminded that the celebration of the birth of Christ is not simply a once-off event, but an ongoing reality in the presence of the Holy spirit.



We are in the midst of the **Twelve Days of Christmas**. The liturgical season of Christmas begins with the celebration of Christ's birth, and ends with the Feast of Epiphany on January 6. The Twelve Days of Christmas include several Feast Days that help to shape the season,

including the Feast of St Stephen, famous as the first person to die for bearing witness to the Christ, the feast of St John, the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents, and the Circumcision of Jesus, which would have taken place when Jesus was around 8 days old. Then, 40 days after Jesus was born, he would have been taken to the temple for dedication, accompanied by a ritual sacrifice of lamb or a pair of doves or pigeons.

Luke 2:22-40

The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: "Every first-born male is to be dedicated to the Lord." They also went to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the law of the Lord.

At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah.

Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God: "Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your

salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel."

The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshiped God, fasting and praying. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown of Nazareth in

Galilee. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon him. Good News Bible

After long years of waiting, we find the fulfillment of God's promises. Good news for all people, as the Spirit of God is revealed at work in the world in a new and amazing way. The birth of Jesus was to become a turning point in time, changing the world for ever. In our world of uncertainty, weariness, injustice and conflict, we too find ourselves longing for the fulfillment of God's promises. The Spirit of God continues to be revealed in our world, bringing the hope and promise of renewal. Christmas is not over, but continues as we live out this promise of faith each and every day. As we enter a new year, may we commit ourselves to living out the significance of Christmas in every aspect of our lives.

A prayer for the New Year

God of endings and beginnings,
God first and last,

we pray for all who are marking the end of another year.

We pray for those who long for this year to end.

Where there is sorrow,
bring comfort.

Where there is brokenness,
bring wholeness.

Where there is pain,
bring healing.

We pray for those who look back on this year with gratitude.

Where support and encouragement
has been offered or received,
sustain community

Where life has been full of joy,
sustain wonder.

Where life has been awash with your presence,
sustain faith.



We pray for your world in all its glory and terror.
Where there is war,
may peace prevail.
Where there is injustice,
may your righteousness come.
Where creation is breaking,
may it be restored.
God of endings and beginnings,
God first and last,
as we stand on the threshold of a new year
send us the gift of the Spirit to reassure us that
by your goodness we dwell in your love.
By your mercy sin is forgiven.
By your grace your kingdom is coming. Amen.

*Rev Sharon Hollis,
President of the Uniting Church in Australia*

Closing

A new year coming and God is with us.

In loving and in carrying,

in hoping and expecting,

God is with us and never lets us go.

God live in us,

God live with us,

God live through us.

God keep us faithful through the days that lie ahead,

God keep us caring in the pain that fills your world,

God keep us serving as we seek to do your will,

God live in us,

God live with us,

God live through us.

God keep us loving toward neighbours near and far,

God keep us trusting through the uncertainties of life,

God keep us sharing from your generous abundance.

God live in us,

God live with us,

God live through us.

Amen.



~ Christine Sine

<http://godspace-msa.com> 4