



31 December 2017

Welcoming the Stranger – Welcoming the Christ

“Thinking allowed; thinking aloud allowed”

Musicians: Marie Cannon KK Clyde Foster KAEO
Readers: Jan Gough KK tba KAEO

Here each Sunday we pray God's blessing over our buildings: thanks for the good that has happened through the week and cleansing for anything troublesome. May the Spirit touch all who come into our church home.



Being family, we watch out for, and care for, one another.

Plugging in

Each new day on earth is a sacred moment.

Lailah Gifty Akita

Gathering with the Saints *Good King Wenceslas* The Irish Rovers

Prayer

God of the wide open spaces,
 you come to us as Jesus Christ,
 born as a child to Mary and Joseph,
 gazed upon by the hill-country shepherds,
 revered by the wise sages from the east,
 and glorified by the angels of the heavenly choirs.

May the saving peace of Jesus
 fill our hearts this Christmas,
 as we pray for others,
 and gather to worship the Son of God.

Bill Bennett, *The Shepherd's Call Te Karanga o te Hēpara*

Hymn *Joy to the world* WOV224

Symbol of God's Presence

Hymn *We three kings* [Jan's choice]

Clarifying our Purpose

Conversation with the Word

Why do people hurt each other?

Based on Isaiah 60:1-6, by Ralph Milton

Reading Matthew 2:1-12

[Why Jesus' first Christmas Gifts were truly shocking](#)

When I was girl, one of my favorite parts of Christmas was unpacking the creche. The box holding the nativity scene spent the year in the back of a closet, its figurines swathed in yellowed pages of newspaper, waiting to be pulled out on Christmas Eve. We would exclaim with joy as we unwrapped sheep and donkeys

and camels, shepherds and wise men, the angels, and, finally, the holy family — Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus.

Mary was my favourite figure and the most beautiful, all dressed in blue and pink. But I confess: The wise men secretly fascinated me. I did not know what to make of those mysterious kings from the East — their black and brown faces served as a compelling contrast to our white baby Jesus. They wore regal robes and carried exotic and expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for an infant born of peasant parents in a barn.

In all honesty, the story did not make sense even to an adult. Why would these strangers do this? There was no way that Jesus and his family could ever repay the debt of gratitude they would incur by accepting such generous presents. They could not give anything in return. There would be no exchange of gifts.

What must have Mary and Joseph thought?

They were Jews, marginalized and poor, oppressed subjects of the Roman Empire. The whole reason they were in a barn in the first place is that authorities forced the young couple, wife heavily pregnant, to leave their home to enroll themselves in a regressive imperial tax scheme.

Mary and Joseph had probably never even seen a king, let alone received gifts from kings. Indeed, all they knew was that kings took from poor people like them — their freedom, hope, dignity, livelihood, income and land.

The whole business of gifts from the Magi must have confused them and might have scared them. I wonder whether they might have wanted to give the loot back, for fear that there were strings attached.

The story of the three kings is not a pretty tale; it is a pretty radical — and even political — one. In the ancient world, gifts were rarely exchanged between people of unequal status.

When it happened, such gifts came with burdensome political expectations. Peasants might offer a gift to a king to demonstrate fidelity, request a favour or plead for mercy. In the unlikely circumstance that a ruler gave a gift to a peasant, the recipient was expected to give something back as a debt of gratitude — in the form of loyalty, a tribute or a tithe. Gifts were used to secure power and privilege for benefactors, the very definition of quid pro quo.

But when the three kings brought gifts to Jesus, they turned gift-giving on its head. Mary and Joseph did not have any gifts — they were neither pleading nor making good with Caesar, Herod or some rival ruler. And the wise men brought their gifts with no expectation of repayment, with no debt of gratitude attached. Gifts were freely given and received in response to love, not in anticipation of reciprocity.

This giving of gifts undermined the normal political order of things, showing not the power of kings, but the undoing of the benefactors' status and entitlement. What happened at the manger was not a gift exchange reinforcing structures of oppression. Rather, these gifts were the first fulfillment of Mary's prophetic song: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble! He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53).

In the world birthed in that stable so long ago, the kings joyfully leave their gifts with the poor and go away empty-handed. No strings attached. No more quid pro quo. No more debts of gratitude, only gifts freely given and shared.

What wonder! What surprise! Obligation is gone, replaced by astonishment. Repayment is neither possible nor necessary.

Gifts are truly gifts, not instruments to discharge favours or reward only those who are deemed loyal enough. The rich have, indeed, come down from their thrones. The Christmas story might fill hearts with the surprise of tenderness, the ache of genuine gratitude and the passion for real justice. The baby and the wise men: a story of gifts and true gratefulness. Joy to the world!

Diana Butler Bass *The Washington Post* December 25

What is God's dream for the world? What is your place in that dream?

Reflection Song *Peace Child* by Shirley Murray sung by Indigo Girls

Conversations around the Table

The World: Our Prayers

Ecumenical Prayer Cycle: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine

We are **thankful** for:

lands and monuments sacred in the origins of Judaism, Christianity and Islam
those who unceasingly work for peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land
those who continue to welcome the multitudes of refugees in their lands.

We **pray** for:

ending the violence racking this region, that the people might live together in peace, security and respect for each other

those who have grown weary and disillusioned in searching for solutions

an end to religious differences being exploited to perpetuate conflict and further displacement of people
political leaders who will courageously bring about justice and reconciliation for the sake of all.

...prayer book prayers...

An excerpt from the Coptic anaphora

O King of peace, give us your peace,
establish for us your peace, and forgive us our sins.
Bless us all, purify our hearts.
Heal the sickness, of our souls and our bodies.
We worship you, O Christ,
with your good Father,
and the Holy Spirit,
for you have come to save us.
Have mercy on us.

Coptic hymn in the form of prayer from the Coptic [Anaphora](#)

A prayer by Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but you.
Great and wonderful are your works, wondrous are your ways.
Thank you for the many splendored variety of your creation.
Thank you for the many ways we affirm your presence and purpose,
Thank you for the freedom to do so.
Forgive our violation of your creation.
Forgive our violence toward each other.
We stand in awe and gratitude at your persistent love
for each and all of your children:
Christian, Jew, Muslim,
as well as those with other faiths.
Grant to all our leaders attributes of the strong;
mutual respect in word and deed,
restraint in the exercise of power,
and the will for peace with justice,
for all.
Eternal God, creator of the universe, there is no God but you. Amen.

Excerpted from *Current Dialogue* 24/93, WCC

Love the World as God Loves

Serving in the Week Ahead - Offering

Blessing

... May the God of hope go with us everyday

CHRISTMAS APPEAL: If you wish to donate to the Christian World Service Appeal "Make Hope My Story", and haven't had a chance to do so yet, please take an envelope available at the service or go on-line to christmasappeal.org.nz/donate/

NOTICES FOR TODAY – 31 DECEMBER 2017

Parish email: admin@kkup.org.nz

Church Office at Cornerstone: 09 407 8250

Minister: Robyn McPhail (DD) 09 283 4802, 02102476280

minister@kkup.org.nz

Ministry Leadership Team: Bev Barke, Alan Robinson, and Robyn

Find us at www.kkup.org.nz and on [Facebook](#)

Notices: Jenny Phillips 09 407 8883 jenny.jane@xtra.co.nz

KK Pastoral: Jessica Scott 09 407 5555 jomscott2@gmail.com

ROSTERED FOR NEXT SUNDAY 7 JANUARY 2018

Organist: Diane Paterson KK Clyde Foster Kaeo

Readers: Ros Simpson KK tba Kaeo

Door and Tea: Bev and Bob Tayler **Flowers:** Lorraine and Elaine

Communion Prep: Bev and Bob Tayler

LECTIONARY READINGS FOR THE COMING WEEK:

Genesis 1:1-5 Psalm 29 Acts 19:1-7 Mark 1:4-11

CAR BOOT SALES: 13 and 26 January 7.30am-12noon at Cornerstone. Contact person: Mary 021722938 or 4071117

KERIKERI SINGING GROUP: The singing group will resume practice on 14 January after the service and morning tea.

HOPE CHURCH: the group who shared the services with us on Sunday 26 November will be trying out a trial arrangement to hold their regular services at Cornerstone. They will arrive quietly (no piano playing in the Hall!) between 10.30 and 11am and begin their service at 11am. Our morning tea and singing is finished in the Hall prior to their expected cuppa time of 12.30pm and they will arrange all the stacking away of the chairs.

It is a trial for five Sundays, 28 January till the end of February. Feedback will be welcome, to see if we can establish a system that works well for both groups and speaks clearly to the wider community of our faith in the action of partnership and respect. As the song puts it "they will know we are Christians by our love".

If this becomes an ongoing arrangement, it is understood that there will be some Sundays when we will need the whole venue right through the morning, e.g. special celebrations or annual meetings.

VOLUNTEER HOSTS: extra help is needed to cover some gaps in January, and particularly in the third and fourth week, and on Wednesdays afternoons any week. Let Robyn know if you can help (contact details at top of page).