

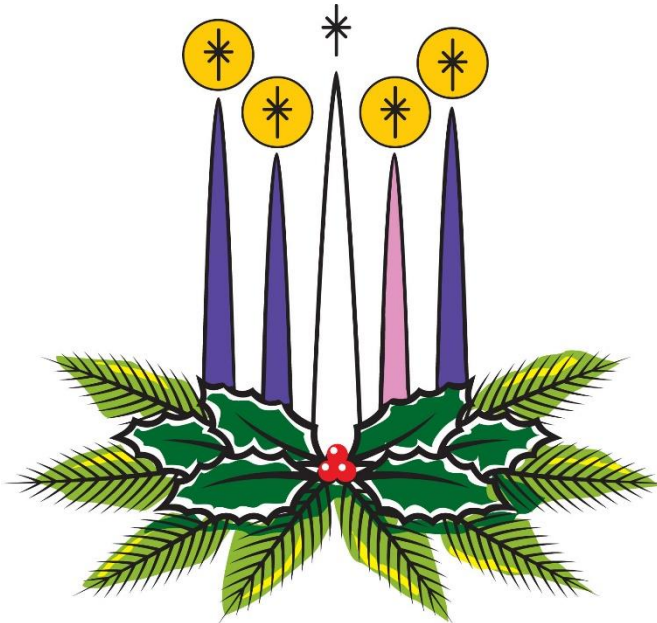


HOON HAY Presbyterian CHURCH

5 Downing Street, Hoon Hay, Christchurch
Phone: (03) 338 8901

enquiries@hoonhaychurch.co.nz
www.hoonhaychurch.co.nz

Today's Preacher: Rev. Dr. Michael Reid **Worship Leader:** Alison Cooper



‘Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home.’

G. K. Chesterton

Mission Statement

To love and serve the Lord Jesus in the Hoon Hay Community

Worshipping God as a family

Offering opportunities to grow in faith

Sharing God's love with people in our community and beyond

ORDER OF SERVICE

Welcome

Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle

The fourth candle symbolises Peace.

On the fourth week of Advent, we light the final purple candle to mark the birth of our Saviour. This final candle, the "Angel's Candle", symbolises peace. It reminds us of the message of the angels: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men". "Jesus Christ the Light of the World" came among us.

Notices

Celebrations and Opening Prayer

Singing: 'O come, all ye faithful'

RESPONSIVE READING:

Psalm 80: 1-7 (NIV)

*For the director of music.
Of Asaph.*

¹Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth ²before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us.

³*Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.*

⁴How long, LORD God Almighty,
will your anger smoulder
against the prayers of your people?

⁵*You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.*

⁶You have made us an object of derision to our neighbours,
and our enemies mock us.

⁷*Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.*

Singing: 'God rest you merry people all'

Dedication of Offering

Intercessory Prayer

SCRIPTURE READINGS (NIV)

Old Testament

Isaiah 9: 6-7

New Testament

John 1: 1-18

Message: 'The Challenge of Christmas'

We celebrate Communion

Communion Responsive

COMMUNION RESPONSE:

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.
It is truly right and our greatest joy,
To give you thanks and praise,
Eternal God, creator and ruler of the universe.



Singing: 'Hark! The herald angels sing'

BENEDICTION

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU IN TODAY'S MESSAGE?



READINGS

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)

⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

John 1:1-18 (NIV)

The Word Became Flesh

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The 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.

¹⁵(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No 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

TEACHING NOTES

Last week I spoke about 'Boundless Love that makes us whole' (a line from Charles Wesley's hymn 'Love divine, all loves excelling'). Love truly came down at Christmas, but in our sinful state, we are not righteous and remain separated from a holy God. The Old Testament points to a saviour for both Jew and Gentile in fulfilment of the revelation to Abram/Abraham (Genesis 12). This love makes us whole because through faith in Christ we are a new creation and enter into the Communion of the Saints, the true spiritual Church. But, as explained, we live in the 'messy middle'; that space where spiritually we are redeemed for eternity but still live in the present reality, which as we know, remains marred by sin, sickness, and disease. Christ has come and His reign has been inaugurated but it is not yet fully realised. The Present Age and the Age to Come sit in tension for us.

Advent occurred at God's initiative; divinity broke through into the human situation in the most tangible way possible – a human being (Christ, the God-Man). John's Gospel speaks of the light entering the darkness and at Christmas we light candles to represent this coming of the light, and rightly so. We no longer live in darkness or are directionless and ruled by fear. However, the challenge of Christmas is to live in the light all year round. How do we do that?

This world is a dangerous place. In the animal kingdom the law of the nature is eat or be eaten. One day find food and live, the next you could be prey (and being eaten alive is incredibly cruel to humane sensibilities). In a civilised society, life and death may not be quite that stark but the challenges we face are still tough and living in the light of Christmas all year is challenging. One thing separating us from other creatures is being made in the divine image (Genesis 1). This does not mean we are 'little gods' but rather, we bear the divine impress in having a mind, a conscience, and will. Of these, the mind is key because thought patterns determine how we live (Proverbs 23:7). And spiritually, the heart and mind are closely connected: desires birthed in the heart and mind lead to actions which gradually shape who we are. The mind is a spiritual battleground so living in the light of Christmas all year requires mental discipline.

The classic book, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* by Harry Blamires (1963), is helpful. Blamires identifies several hallmarks of Christian thinking: 1. Its Supernatural Orientation, 2. Its Awareness of Evil, 3. Its Conception of Truth, 4. Its Acceptance of Authority, 5. Its Concern for the Person, and 6. Its Sacramental Cast. I will briefly touch on each of these to help us take the light of Christmas into the other 364 days of the year (1 + 364).

2 Timothy 5:17 says, '...anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!' (NLT). But it's a battle – spiritually, emotionally, and in other ways. Cultivating the Christian mind is essential but so too is staying committed and connected. Paul is bullish on 'the body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12) and living in the light all year requires intentionality about church and service – even when we don't feel like it. We serve a faithful, covenant-keeping God, and walking in the light as a new creation should reflect that great virtue.

PASTOR'S REFLECTION

I watched the programme 'Anger, Anxiety, & Us' hosted by journalist John Campbell last Sunday evening. It seemed an appropriate theme given recent events. It began with short testimonies of frontline workers who have experienced aggression and even violence in the line of duty; security staff, ambulance paramedics, health and supermarket workers, police personnel – all people just doing their job. Then, in his animated fashion, Mr Campbell asked the key question: *Why?* Why are these ordinary citizens being so harassed when just a few months' ago during the first lockdown they were mostly appreciated and praised? It's a fair question.

Viewed from afar New Zealanders are generally considered laid-back. The predominantly rural stereotypes of 'she'll be right' and the rugged individualism that can fix most things with No.8 fencing wire persist – even though Fred Dagg (John Clarke) is sadly no longer with us. Not too much gets Kiwis riled but when we are there may be no holding back. A threshold is crossed then it's all go. The Freedom marches are a case in point. As I see it, these are like a river that has many tributaries (sources of discontent), and each small creek and stream feeds into a swift and powerful river: a current with unstoppable momentum. The Groundswell movement among farmers is understandable given they feel blamed for most of our environmental woes, and the brunt of legislative change falls on them because they are 'guilty'; this, plus feeling the changes are sudden and punitive. Add to this many urban people who have either lost income and/or their jobs because of the Covid restrictions; then still others who dislike the present government and a public rally becomes an opportunity to vent all manner of pent-up frustrations. The discontent could be over MIQ injustices, the liberalisation of abortion and sexuality issues, or the euthanasia legislation. The list goes on. The stability of daily life has been shaken and the laws, e.g. vaccine passes, have indeed, been intrusive. There is widespread loss of trust, dislocation, and uncertainty. Roll these factors together and we can see why our society is divided and certain sectors and individuals are angry.

To my mind, the Campbell interview didn't really address the issues. It allowed a variety of people to have their say but the analysis was through a psychological lens. This is valid and insightful to a point but is not sufficient. There is a spiritual aspect, too. The way we are created and wired is important. Anger, be it private or publicly expressed is a secondary emotion. We lash out verbally or sometimes physically because *we are fearful*. Fear is the primary emotion. The potential or actual loss of our job, livelihood, and income; fear of losing our health and mobility, and, let's be honest, in the present situation; a fear of dying. How then can fear be addressed? It is not enough to just say 'be kind'. That's a nice thought but is like wallpapering over cracks that will simply re-appear.

Believers have many promises in Scripture. 'God hasn't given us a spirit of fear, but of love, power, and a sound mind' (2 Timothy,1:7), 'Fear not, for I am with you' (Isaiah 41:10), 'Love casts out fear'(1 John 4:18). 'Fear not' appears (believe it or not) 365 times in the Bible – a promise for dealing with fear every day of the year! There is, however, a *healthy* type of fear: the fear of God. This is not a fear that scares or paralyses but it is about reverence for God, His precepts and wisdom: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 9:10). Like any emotion that threatens to overwhelm us, real wisdom is more than trying hard to 'be kind' – we just can't do it. We need divine guidance that changes us from the inside out.

Blessings for a good week,

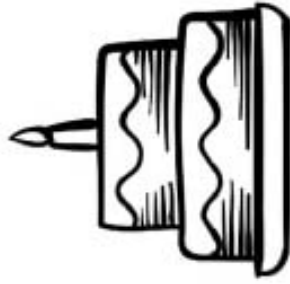
Michael

Happy Birthday Jesus

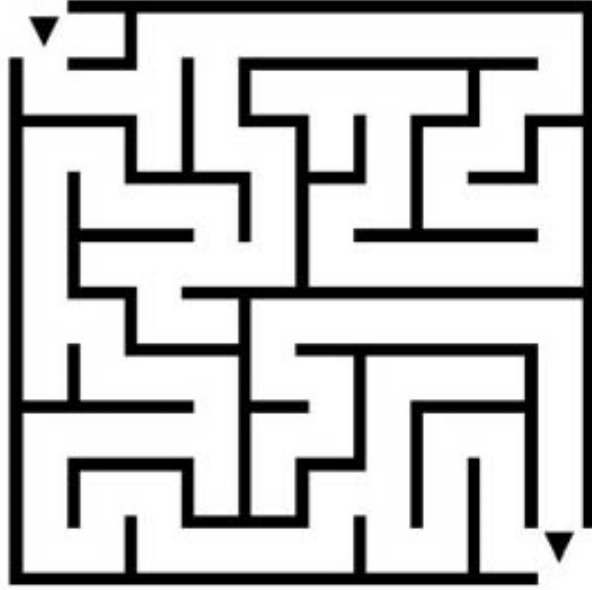
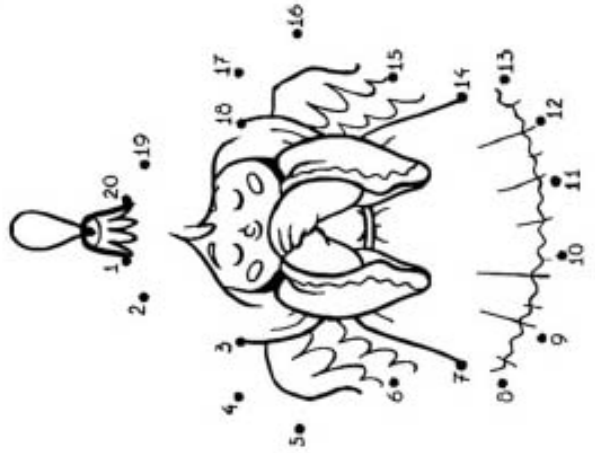
_____ 's Christmas Coloring

Fill in the blanks (Isaiah 9:6)

For unto us a _____ is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, _____, Prince of Peace.

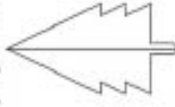


Connect the dots

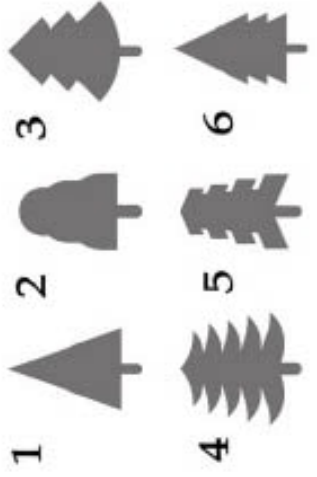


Help the kids get to the cake so they can sing Happy Birthday to Jesus, on Christmas morning.

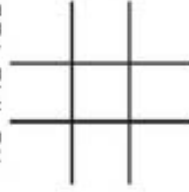
Shadow Matching Game



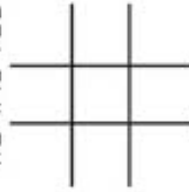
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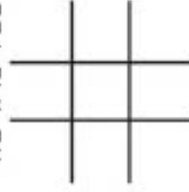
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TIC TAC TOE



TIC TAC TOE



Unscramble to see what presents the Wise Men gave Baby Jesus



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