

1st Sunday after

Christmas

9 am

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth and God's ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1). In God's sovereignty, God has allowed other groups to migrate to these shores. We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now.

Welcome, praise and thanksgiving to God

The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory.

Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sentence

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Prayer of Approach

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we humbly thank you for life and health and safety, for freedom to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life. But above all, we praise you for our Saviour Jesus Christ, for his death and resurrection; for the gift of your Spirit; and for the hope of sharing in your glory. Fill our hearts with all joy and believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening Song: O Come all ye faithful

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye
to Bethlehem!

Come, and behold Him,
born the King of angels!
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord!

2 True God of true God,
Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not
the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore Him

3 See how the shepherds
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks,
draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps.

O come, let us adore Him

6 Sing, choirs of angels;
sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens
of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him

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Collect of the Day

Saving God, whose Son Jesus was presented in the temple and was acclaimed the glory of Israel and the light of the nations; grant that in him we may be presented to you and in the world may reflect his glory; who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

Heavenly Father, as we listen to your Word, grant to us ears that hear and eyes that see what the Spirit is saying to our hearts. May your Word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory. **Amen.**

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 61, commencing and verse 18 to 20 and 26.

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Hear the word of the Lord **thanks be to God.**

The Psalm for today is Psalm 132, beginning at verse 10 to 18.

For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one.

¹¹ **The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:**

"One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever.”

¹³ **For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,**

¹⁴ “This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

¹⁵ **I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.**

¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.

¹⁷ **“Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one.**

¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown.”

Glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as in the beginning, so now and forever. Amen.

**The second reading comes from the letter to the Hebrews,
chapter 2 verses 5 to 9.**

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?

⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Song: Let there be love

Let there be love shared
among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now your love
sweep this nation,
cause us Oh Lord to arise.

Give us a fresh understanding
of brotherly love that is real,
let there be love
shared among us,
let there be love.

Repeat

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The Gospel of our Lord, according to Luke, Chapter 2, commencing at verse 22 to 40.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

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³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the Gospel of our Lord, **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Apostles' Creed

We believe in one God, who made and loves all that is.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was born, lived, died and rose again, and is coming to call all to account.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls, equips and sends out God's people and brings all things to their true end.

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Message: You are a living stone!

Greetings!

Well it's the last message for 2023, and I pray it helps us all in our life's journeys, as we continue to say yes to God's calling on us as people of faith.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we reflect on Paul's letter to the Galatians, it is one of most moving of Paul's letters to the churches. It is clear that Paul is fighting for his calling and the fight is partly for himself, because if he is wrong, and God has not called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, then his whole life is wasted.

More importantly, it is for his converts, because if Paul has mistaken his vocation, then he has misled all those Gentiles who have given their lives to Christ through his preaching.

His argument is passionate, personal and we could say intricately involved. There are passages of personal history, interspersed with technical and not always transparent pieces of scriptural analysis. There are calm and carefully reasoned passages, side by side with passages that are derogatory. Our reading in Chapter 4 is at the heart of Paul's whole argument.

It is hard for us today to hear the real pain and joy in this passage about sonship, but it speaks powerfully of what Paul has given up, and why.

- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
- He was one of God's chosen people, an inheritor of the promises made to Abraham & David, automatically 'one of the family'.

Paul was clearly not alone in finding Jesus's preaching deeply threatening to that sense of being right with God. The Gospels show us that many of the religious leaders who met Jesus, hated him, and rejected all that he said and demonstrated about God.

Paul's own rejection of Jesus led him to help in violent persecution of Jesus' followers, which only ended with his meeting with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. When Paul finally accepts that his hostility towards Christians is a hostility towards God, he steps instantly out of his privileged insider's relationship with God.

So when, here in Galatians, Paul talks about our '**adoption**' as God's children, there is a complicated and moving dynamic going on.

Once, Paul would have assumed that he was a child of God, and heir to God's promises, simply because of who he was and where he was born.

But now he accepts in gratitude from God's hands what he once thought was his by right!

Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

If we think that we already are a child of God, or that we don't need any teaching about how to be a child of God, or that God is bound to choose us as his child and reject others, then we have not begun to understand what only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

Paul saw, in humility and joy, the huge shift that happens when God sends his only Son.

Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

Our Gospel reading from St Luke, tells us Mary, begins to see it too. Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son's cradle and demand a part in his birth! She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all!

'But I thought God's messenger and God's meaning was a gift to me,' Mary thought, 'and now I find he has been telling half the world.'

Before Mary has even started to be able to cling to, possess, to believe herself the only 'favoured one', the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her 'gripping fingers', and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it.

Quietly, 'treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart', Mary names her son.

No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph's, but the name the angelic messenger gave her.

God does not belong even to us, who love him and yet **He** is a gift that we can share.

May we find direction and purpose, in an unshakable trust in our good God and Father.

He has visited us with His light.

May we never walk in darkness.

Amen.

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**Heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have broken your holy laws
and have left undone what we ought not have done.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Promise of Forgiveness

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live. In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Christmas Bowl Prayer for all

In Colossians we read: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray for all those whom we have met through the stories of the Christmas Bowl. We offer you our words and deeds, our money and our hope as we offer our thanks for these opportunities to learn and to give. Bless the work of Act for Peace and all its partners in places of need, that your vision of a renewed world of peace and justice may be fulfilled. **Amen.**

Prayers and Intercessions

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your beloved children give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal.

We conclude by praying as our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,**

your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Commitment to live out our worship of the Lord

Living God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

**Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people, in
the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Song: Joy to the World

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Devotional for New Year: Time for a Spring Clean of your heart?



All of us recognise the need for our homes to undergo a thorough and extensive spring clean – but what about our hearts? Do not our hearts need a spring clean as well?

It is not until you start to sort through the three boxes of what should be thrown away, given away and held onto that you realise how important this process really is.

And what better time to do this spring clean, but at the beginning of the new year! This devotional will continue for the first few weeks of 2024.



Next Sunday at Southlakes

7th January | Epiphany

Are you on?

Deacon: Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Cantors

**1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 |
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Prayers and Intercessions:

Please
refer to
latest
roster.



First Sunday after Christmas



Thank you!

In a world that often feels divided, you've come together with churches across Australia to stand alongside those uprooted by conflict and disaster. Thank you for standing with Act for Peace's local partners to bring practical care – as well as hope, peace, joy, love and light – to people in urgent need around the world.

By joining together through the Christmas Bowl, you are helping build a world where all people have a safe place to belong. **Thank you.**



CALL: 1800 025 101 VISIT: actforpeace.org.au/christmasbowl

The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188

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Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

If we think that we already are a child of God, or that we don't need any teaching about how to be a child of God, or that God is bound to choose us as his child and reject others, then we have not begun to understand what only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

Paul saw, in humility and joy, the huge shift that happens when God sends his only Son.

Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

Our Gospel reading from St Luke, tells us Mary, begins to see it too.

Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son's cradle and demand a part in his birth! She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all!

'But I thought God's messenger and God's meaning was a gift to me,' Mary thought, 'and now I find he has been telling half the world.'

Before Mary has even started to be able to cling to, possess, to believe herself the only 'favoured one', the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her 'gripping fingers', and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it.

Quietly, 'treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart', Mary names her son.

No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph's, but the name the angelic messenger gave her.

God does not belong even to us, who love him and yet **He** is a gift that we can share.

May we find direction and purpose, in an unshakable trust in our good God and Father.

He has visited us with His light.

May we never walk in darkness.

Amen.

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**Heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have broken your holy laws
and have left undone what we ought not have done.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Promise of Forgiveness

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live. In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Christmas Bowl Prayer for all

In Colossians we read: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray for all those whom we have met through the stories of the Christmas Bowl. We offer you our words and deeds, our money and our hope as we offer our thanks for these opportunities to learn and to give. Bless the work of Act for Peace and all its partners in places of need, that your vision of a renewed world of peace and justice may be fulfilled. **Amen.**

Prayers and Intercessions

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your beloved children give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal.

We conclude by praying as our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Commitment to live out our worship of the Lord

Living God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

**Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people, in
the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Song: Joy to the World

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Devotional for New Year: Time for a Spring Clean of your heart?



All of us recognise the need for our homes to undergo a thorough and extensive spring clean – but what about our hearts? Do not our hearts need a spring clean as well?

It is not until you start to sort through the three boxes of what should be thrown away, given away and held onto that you realise how important this process really is.

And what better time to do this spring clean, but at the beginning of the new year! This devotional will continue for the first few weeks of 2024.



Next Sunday at Southlakes

7th January | Epiphany

Are you on?

Deacon: Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Cantors

**1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 |
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Prayers and Intercessions:

Please
refer to
latest
roster.



First Sunday after Christmas



Thank you!

In a world that often feels divided, you've come together with churches across Australia to stand alongside those uprooted by conflict and disaster. Thank you for standing with Act for Peace's local partners to bring practical care – as well as hope, peace, joy, love and light – to people in urgent need around the world.

By joining together through the Christmas Bowl, you are helping build a world where all people have a safe place to belong. **Thank you.**



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The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188

1st Sunday after

Christmas

9 am

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth and God's ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1). In God's sovereignty, God has allowed other groups to migrate to these shores. We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now.

Welcome, praise and thanksgiving to God

The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory.

Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sentence

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Prayer of Approach

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we humbly thank you for life and health and safety, for freedom to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life. But above all, we praise you for our Saviour Jesus Christ, for his death and resurrection; for the gift of your Spirit; and for the hope of sharing in your glory. Fill our hearts with all joy and believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening Song: O Come all ye faithful

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye
to Bethlehem!

Come, and behold Him,
born the King of angels!
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord!

2 True God of true God,
Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not
the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore Him

3 See how the shepherds
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks,
draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps.

O come, let us adore Him

6 Sing, choirs of angels;
sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens
of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him

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Collect of the Day

Saving God, whose Son Jesus was presented in the temple and was acclaimed the glory of Israel and the light of the nations; grant that in him we may be presented to you and in the world may reflect his glory; who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

Heavenly Father, as we listen to your Word, grant to us ears that hear and eyes that see what the Spirit is saying to our hearts. May your Word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory. **Amen.**

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 61, commencing and verse 18 to 20 and 26.

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Hear the word of the Lord **thanks be to God.**

The Psalm for today is Psalm 132, beginning at verse 10 to 18.

For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one.

¹¹ **The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:**

"One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever.”

¹³ **For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,**

¹⁴ “This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

¹⁵ **I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.**

¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.

¹⁷ **“Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one.**

¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown.”

Glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as in the beginning, so now and forever. Amen.

**The second reading comes from the letter to the Hebrews,
chapter 2 verses 5 to 9.**

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?

⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Song: Let there be love

Let there be love shared
among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now your love
sweep this nation,
cause us Oh Lord to arise.

Give us a fresh understanding
of brotherly love that is real,
let there be love
shared among us,
let there be love.

Repeat

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The Gospel of our Lord, according to Luke, Chapter 2, commencing at verse 22 to 40.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the Gospel of our Lord, **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Apostles' Creed

**We believe in one God, who made and loves all that is.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who
was born, lived, died and rose again, and is coming to call
all to account.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls, equips and sends
out God's people and brings all things to their true end.**

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Message: You are a living stone!

Greetings!

Well it's the last message for 2023, and I pray it helps us all in our life's journeys, as we continue to say yes to God's calling on us as people of faith.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we reflect on Paul's letter to the Galatians, it is one of most moving of Paul's letters to the churches. It is clear that Paul is fighting for his calling and the fight is partly for himself, because if he is wrong, and God has not called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, then his whole life is wasted.

More importantly, it is for his converts, because if Paul has mistaken his vocation, then he has misled all those Gentiles who have given their lives to Christ through his preaching.

His argument is passionate, personal and we could say intricately involved. There are passages of personal history, interspersed with technical and not always transparent pieces of scriptural analysis. There are calm and carefully reasoned passages, side by side with passages that are derogatory. Our reading in Chapter 4 is at the heart of Paul's whole argument.

It is hard for us today to hear the real pain and joy in this passage about sonship, but it speaks powerfully of what Paul has given up, and why.

- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
- He was one of God's chosen people, an inheritor of the promises made to Abraham & David, automatically 'one of the family'.

Paul was clearly not alone in finding Jesus's preaching deeply threatening to that sense of being right with God. The Gospels show us that many of the religious leaders who met Jesus, hated him, and rejected all that he said and demonstrated about God.

Paul's own rejection of Jesus led him to help in violent persecution of Jesus' followers, which only ended with his meeting with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. When Paul finally accepts that his hostility towards Christians is a hostility towards God, he steps instantly out of his privileged insider's relationship with God.

So when, here in Galatians, Paul talks about our '**adoption**' as God's children, there is a complicated and moving dynamic going on.

Once, Paul would have assumed that he was a child of God, and heir to God's promises, simply because of who he was and where he was born.

But now he accepts in gratitude from God's hands what he once thought was his by right!

Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

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Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

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² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Hear the word of the Lord **thanks be to God.**

The Psalm for today is Psalm 132, beginning at verse 10 to 18.

For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one.

¹¹ **The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:**

"One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever.”

¹³ **For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,**

¹⁴ “This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

¹⁵ **I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.**

¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.

¹⁷ **“Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one.**

¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown.”

Glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as in the beginning, so now and forever. Amen.

**The second reading comes from the letter to the Hebrews,
chapter 2 verses 5 to 9.**

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?

⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Song: Let there be love

Let there be love shared
among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now your love
sweep this nation,
cause us Oh Lord to arise.

Give us a fresh understanding
of brotherly love that is real,
let there be love
shared among us,
let there be love.

Repeat

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The Gospel of our Lord, according to Luke, Chapter 2, commencing at verse 22 to 40.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the Gospel of our Lord, **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Apostles' Creed

**We believe in one God, who made and loves all that is.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who
was born, lived, died and rose again, and is coming to call
all to account.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls, equips and sends
out God's people and brings all things to their true end.**

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Message: You are a living stone!

Greetings!

Well it's the last message for 2023, and I pray it helps us all in our life's journeys, as we continue to say yes to God's calling on us as people of faith.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we reflect on Paul's letter to the Galatians, it is one of most moving of Paul's letters to the churches. It is clear that Paul is fighting for his calling and the fight is partly for himself, because if he is wrong, and God has not called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, then his whole life is wasted.

More importantly, it is for his converts, because if Paul has mistaken his vocation, then he has misled all those Gentiles who have given their lives to Christ through his preaching.

His argument is passionate, personal and we could say intricately involved. There are passages of personal history, interspersed with technical and not always transparent pieces of scriptural analysis. There are calm and carefully reasoned passages, side by side with passages that are derogatory. Our reading in Chapter 4 is at the heart of Paul's whole argument.

It is hard for us today to hear the real pain and joy in this passage about sonship, but it speaks powerfully of what Paul has given up, and why.

- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
- He was one of God's chosen people, an inheritor of the promises made to Abraham & David, automatically 'one of the family'.

Paul was clearly not alone in finding Jesus's preaching deeply threatening to that sense of being right with God. The Gospels show us that many of the religious leaders who met Jesus, hated him, and rejected all that he said and demonstrated about God.

Paul's own rejection of Jesus led him to help in violent persecution of Jesus' followers, which only ended with his meeting with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. When Paul finally accepts that his hostility towards Christians is a hostility towards God, he steps instantly out of his privileged insider's relationship with God.

So when, here in Galatians, Paul talks about our '**adoption**' as God's children, there is a complicated and moving dynamic going on.

Once, Paul would have assumed that he was a child of God, and heir to God's promises, simply because of who he was and where he was born.

But now he accepts in gratitude from God's hands what he once thought was his by right!

Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

If we think that we already are a child of God, or that we don't need any teaching about how to be a child of God, or that God is bound to choose us as his child and reject others, then we have not begun to understand what only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

Paul saw, in humility and joy, the huge shift that happens when God sends his only Son.

Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

Our Gospel reading from St Luke, tells us Mary, begins to see it too. Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son's cradle and demand a part in his birth! She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all!

'But I thought God's messenger and God's meaning was a gift to me,' Mary thought, 'and now I find he has been telling half the world.'

Before Mary has even started to be able to cling to, possess, to believe herself the only 'favoured one', the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her 'gripping fingers', and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it.

Quietly, 'treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart', Mary names her son.

No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph's, but the name the angelic messenger gave her.

God does not belong even to us, who love him and yet **He** is a gift that we can share.

May we find direction and purpose, in an unshakable trust in our good God and Father.

He has visited us with His light.

May we never walk in darkness.

Amen.

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**Heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have broken your holy laws
and have left undone what we ought not have done.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Promise of Forgiveness

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live. In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Christmas Bowl Prayer for all

In Colossians we read: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray for all those whom we have met through the stories of the Christmas Bowl. We offer you our words and deeds, our money and our hope as we offer our thanks for these opportunities to learn and to give. Bless the work of Act for Peace and all its partners in places of need, that your vision of a renewed world of peace and justice may be fulfilled. **Amen.**

Prayers and Intercessions

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your beloved children give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal.

We conclude by praying as our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,**

your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Commitment to live out our worship of the Lord

Living God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

**Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people, in
the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Song: Joy to the World

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Devotional for New Year: Time for a Spring Clean of your heart?



All of us recognise the need for our homes to undergo a thorough and extensive spring clean – but what about our hearts? Do not our hearts need a spring clean as well?

It is not until you start to sort through the three boxes of what should be thrown away, given away and held onto that you realise how important this process really is.

And what better time to do this spring clean, but at the beginning of the new year! This devotional will continue for the first few weeks of 2024.



Next Sunday at Southlakes

7th January | Epiphany

Are you on?

Deacon: Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Cantors

**1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 |
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Prayers and Intercessions:

Please
refer to
latest
roster.



First Sunday after Christmas



Thank you!

In a world that often feels divided, you've come together with churches across Australia to stand alongside those uprooted by conflict and disaster. Thank you for standing with Act for Peace's local partners to bring practical care – as well as hope, peace, joy, love and light – to people in urgent need around the world.

By joining together through the Christmas Bowl, you are helping build a world where all people have a safe place to belong. **Thank you.**



CALL: 1800 025 101 VISIT: actforpeace.org.au/christmasbowl

The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188

1st Sunday after

Christmas

9 am

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth and God's ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1). In God's sovereignty, God has allowed other groups to migrate to these shores. We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now.

Welcome, praise and thanksgiving to God

The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory.

Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sentence

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Prayer of Approach

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we humbly thank you for life and health and safety, for freedom to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life. But above all, we praise you for our Saviour Jesus Christ, for his death and resurrection; for the gift of your Spirit; and for the hope of sharing in your glory. Fill our hearts with all joy and believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening Song: O Come all ye faithful

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye
to Bethlehem!

Come, and behold Him,
born the King of angels!
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord!

2 True God of true God,
Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not
the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore Him

3 See how the shepherds
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks,
draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps.

O come, let us adore Him

6 Sing, choirs of angels;
sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens
of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him

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Collect of the Day

Saving God, whose Son Jesus was presented in the temple and was acclaimed the glory of Israel and the light of the nations; grant that in him we may be presented to you and in the world may reflect his glory; who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

Heavenly Father, as we listen to your Word, grant to us ears that hear and eyes that see what the Spirit is saying to our hearts. May your Word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory. **Amen.**

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 61, commencing and verse 18 to 20 and 26.

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
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The Message: You are a living stone!

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- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
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Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Christmas Bowl Prayer for all

In Colossians we read: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray for all those whom we have met through the stories of the Christmas Bowl. We offer you our words and deeds, our money and our hope as we offer our thanks for these opportunities to learn and to give. Bless the work of Act for Peace and all its partners in places of need, that your vision of a renewed world of peace and justice may be fulfilled. **Amen.**

Prayers and Intercessions

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your beloved children give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal.

We conclude by praying as our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,**

your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Commitment to live out our worship of the Lord

Living God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

**Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people, in
the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Song: Joy to the World

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Devotional for New Year: Time for a Spring Clean of your heart?



All of us recognise the need for our homes to undergo a thorough and extensive spring clean – but what about our hearts? Do not our hearts need a spring clean as well?

It is not until you start to sort through the three boxes of what should be thrown away, given away and held onto that you realise how important this process really is.

And what better time to do this spring clean, but at the beginning of the new year! This devotional will continue for the first few weeks of 2024.



Next Sunday at Southlakes

7th January | Epiphany

Are you on?

Deacon: Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Cantors

**1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 |
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Prayers and Intercessions:

Please
refer to
latest
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First Sunday after Christmas



Thank you!

In a world that often feels divided, you've come together with churches across Australia to stand alongside those uprooted by conflict and disaster. Thank you for standing with Act for Peace's local partners to bring practical care – as well as hope, peace, joy, love and light – to people in urgent need around the world.

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The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188

1st Sunday after

Christmas

9 am

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth and God's ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1). In God's sovereignty, God has allowed other groups to migrate to these shores. We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now.

Welcome, praise and thanksgiving to God

The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory.

Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sentence

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Prayer of Approach

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we humbly thank you for life and health and safety, for freedom to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life. But above all, we praise you for our Saviour Jesus Christ, for his death and resurrection; for the gift of your Spirit; and for the hope of sharing in your glory. Fill our hearts with all joy and believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening Song: O Come all ye faithful

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye
to Bethlehem!

Come, and behold Him,
born the King of angels!
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord!

2 True God of true God,
Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not
the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore Hi

3 See how the shepherds
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks,
draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps.

O come, let us adore Him

6 Sing, choirs of angels;
sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens
of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him

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Collect of the Day

Saving God, whose Son Jesus was presented in the temple and was acclaimed the glory of Israel and the light of the nations; grant that in him we may be presented to you and in the world may reflect his glory; who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

Heavenly Father, as we listen to your Word, grant to us ears that hear and eyes that see what the Spirit is saying to our hearts. May your Word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory. **Amen.**

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 61, commencing and verse 18 to 20 and 26.

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Hear the word of the Lord **thanks be to God.**

The Psalm for today is Psalm 132, beginning at verse 10 to 18.

For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one.

¹¹ **The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:**

"One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever.”

¹³ **For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,**

¹⁴ “This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

¹⁵ **I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.**

¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.

¹⁷ **“Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one.**

¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown.”

Glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as in the beginning, so now and forever. Amen.

**The second reading comes from the letter to the Hebrews,
chapter 2 verses 5 to 9.**

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?

⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Song: Let there be love

Let there be love shared
among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now your love
sweep this nation,
cause us Oh Lord to arise.

Give us a fresh understanding
of brotherly love that is real,
let there be love
shared among us,
let there be love.

Repeat

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The Gospel of our Lord, according to Luke, Chapter 2, commencing at verse 22 to 40.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the Gospel of our Lord, **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Apostles' Creed

**We believe in one God, who made and loves all that is.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who
was born, lived, died and rose again, and is coming to call
all to account.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls, equips and sends
out God's people and brings all things to their true end.**

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Message: You are a living stone!

Greetings!

Well it's the last message for 2023, and I pray it helps us all in our life's journeys, as we continue to say yes to God's calling on us as people of faith.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we reflect on Paul's letter to the Galatians, it is one of most moving of Paul's letters to the churches. It is clear that Paul is fighting for his calling and the fight is partly for himself, because if he is wrong, and God has not called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, then his whole life is wasted.

More importantly, it is for his converts, because if Paul has mistaken his vocation, then he has misled all those Gentiles who have given their lives to Christ through his preaching.

His argument is passionate, personal and we could say intricately involved. There are passages of personal history, interspersed with technical and not always transparent pieces of scriptural analysis. There are calm and carefully reasoned passages, side by side with passages that are derogatory. Our reading in Chapter 4 is at the heart of Paul's whole argument.

It is hard for us today to hear the real pain and joy in this passage about sonship, but it speaks powerfully of what Paul has given up, and why.

- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
- He was one of God's chosen people, an inheritor of the promises made to Abraham & David, automatically 'one of the family'.

Paul was clearly not alone in finding Jesus's preaching deeply threatening to that sense of being right with God. The Gospels show us that many of the religious leaders who met Jesus, hated him, and rejected all that he said and demonstrated about God.

Paul's own rejection of Jesus led him to help in violent persecution of Jesus' followers, which only ended with his meeting with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. When Paul finally accepts that his hostility towards Christians is a hostility towards God, he steps instantly out of his privileged insider's relationship with God.

So when, here in Galatians, Paul talks about our '**adoption**' as God's children, there is a complicated and moving dynamic going on.

Once, Paul would have assumed that he was a child of God, and heir to God's promises, simply because of who he was and where he was born.

But now he accepts in gratitude from God's hands what he once thought was his by right!

Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

If we think that we already are a child of God, or that we don't need any teaching about how to be a child of God, or that God is bound to choose us as his child and reject others, then we have not begun to understand what only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

Paul saw, in humility and joy, the huge shift that happens when God sends his only Son.

Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

Our Gospel reading from St Luke, tells us Mary, begins to see it too.

Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son's cradle and demand a part in his birth! She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all!

'But I thought God's messenger and God's meaning was a gift to me,' Mary thought, 'and now I find he has been telling half the world.'

Before Mary has even started to be able to cling to, possess, to believe herself the only 'favoured one', the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her 'gripping fingers', and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it.

Quietly, 'treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart', Mary names her son.

No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph's, but the name the angelic messenger gave her.

God does not belong even to us, who love him and yet **He** is a gift that we can share.

May we find direction and purpose, in an unshakable trust in our good God and Father.

He has visited us with His light.

May we never walk in darkness.

Amen.

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**Heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have broken your holy laws
and have left undone what we ought not have done.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Promise of Forgiveness

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live. In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

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²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the Gospel of our Lord, **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Apostles' Creed

**We believe in one God, who made and loves all that is.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who
was born, lived, died and rose again, and is coming to call
all to account.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls, equips and sends
out God's people and brings all things to their true end.**

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Message: You are a living stone!

Greetings!

Well it's the last message for 2023, and I pray it helps us all in our life's journeys, as we continue to say yes to God's calling on us as people of faith.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we reflect on Paul's letter to the Galatians, it is one of most moving of Paul's letters to the churches. It is clear that Paul is fighting for his calling and the fight is partly for himself, because if he is wrong, and God has not called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, then his whole life is wasted.

More importantly, it is for his converts, because if Paul has mistaken his vocation, then he has misled all those Gentiles who have given their lives to Christ through his preaching.

His argument is passionate, personal and we could say intricately involved. There are passages of personal history, interspersed with technical and not always transparent pieces of scriptural analysis. There are calm and carefully reasoned passages, side by side with passages that are derogatory. Our reading in Chapter 4 is at the heart of Paul's whole argument.

It is hard for us today to hear the real pain and joy in this passage about sonship, but it speaks powerfully of what Paul has given up, and why.

- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
- He was one of God's chosen people, an inheritor of the promises made to Abraham & David, automatically 'one of the family'.

Paul was clearly not alone in finding Jesus's preaching deeply threatening to that sense of being right with God. The Gospels show us that many of the religious leaders who met Jesus, hated him, and rejected all that he said and demonstrated about God.

Paul's own rejection of Jesus led him to help in violent persecution of Jesus' followers, which only ended with his meeting with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. When Paul finally accepts that his hostility towards Christians is a hostility towards God, he steps instantly out of his privileged insider's relationship with God.

So when, here in Galatians, Paul talks about our '**adoption**' as God's children, there is a complicated and moving dynamic going on.

Once, Paul would have assumed that he was a child of God, and heir to God's promises, simply because of who he was and where he was born.

But now he accepts in gratitude from God's hands what he once thought was his by right!

Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

If we think that we already are a child of God, or that we don't need any teaching about how to be a child of God, or that God is bound to choose us as his child and reject others, then we have not begun to understand what only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

Paul saw, in humility and joy, the huge shift that happens when God sends his only Son.

Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

Our Gospel reading from St Luke, tells us Mary, begins to see it too.

Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son's cradle and demand a part in his birth! She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all!

'But I thought God's messenger and God's meaning was a gift to me,' Mary thought, 'and now I find he has been telling half the world.'

Before Mary has even started to be able to cling to, possess, to believe herself the only 'favoured one', the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her 'gripping fingers', and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it.

Quietly, 'treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart', Mary names her son.

No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph's, but the name the angelic messenger gave her.

God does not belong even to us, who love him and yet **He** is a gift that we can share.

May we find direction and purpose, in an unshakable trust in our good God and Father.

He has visited us with His light.

May we never walk in darkness.

Amen.

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**Heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have broken your holy laws
and have left undone what we ought not have done.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Promise of Forgiveness

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live. In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Christmas Bowl Prayer for all

In Colossians we read: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray for all those whom we have met through the stories of the Christmas Bowl. We offer you our words and deeds, our money and our hope as we offer our thanks for these opportunities to learn and to give. Bless the work of Act for Peace and all its partners in places of need, that your vision of a renewed world of peace and justice may be fulfilled. **Amen.**

Prayers and Intercessions

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your beloved children give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal.

We conclude by praying as our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Commitment to live out our worship of the Lord

Living God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

**Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people, in
the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Song: Joy to the World

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Devotional for New Year: Time for a Spring Clean of your heart?



All of us recognise the need for our homes to undergo a thorough and extensive spring clean – but what about our hearts? Do not our hearts need a spring clean as well?

It is not until you start to sort through the three boxes of what should be thrown away, given away and held onto that you realise how important this process really is.

And what better time to do this spring clean, but at the beginning of the new year! This devotional will continue for the first few weeks of 2024.



Next Sunday at Southlakes

7th January | Epiphany

Are you on?

Deacon: Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Cantors

**1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 |
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Prayers and Intercessions:

Please
refer to
latest
roster.



First Sunday after Christmas



Thank you!

In a world that often feels divided, you've come together with churches across Australia to stand alongside those uprooted by conflict and disaster. Thank you for standing with Act for Peace's local partners to bring practical care – as well as hope, peace, joy, love and light – to people in urgent need around the world.

By joining together through the Christmas Bowl, you are helping build a world where all people have a safe place to belong. **Thank you.**



CALL: 1800 025 101 VISIT: actforpeace.org.au/christmasbowl

The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188

1st Sunday after

Christmas

9 am

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth and God's ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1). In God's sovereignty, God has allowed other groups to migrate to these shores. We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now.

Welcome, praise and thanksgiving to God

The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory.

Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sentence

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Prayer of Approach

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we humbly thank you for life and health and safety, for freedom to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life. But above all, we praise you for our Saviour Jesus Christ, for his death and resurrection; for the gift of your Spirit; and for the hope of sharing in your glory. Fill our hearts with all joy and believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening Song: O Come all ye faithful

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye
to Bethlehem!

Come, and behold Him,
born the King of angels!
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord!

2 True God of true God,
Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not
the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore Him

3 See how the shepherds
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks,
draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps.

O come, let us adore Him

6 Sing, choirs of angels;
sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens
of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him

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Collect of the Day

Saving God, whose Son Jesus was presented in the temple and was acclaimed the glory of Israel and the light of the nations; grant that in him we may be presented to you and in the world may reflect his glory; who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

Heavenly Father, as we listen to your Word, grant to us ears that hear and eyes that see what the Spirit is saying to our hearts. May your Word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory. **Amen.**

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 61, commencing and verse 18 to 20 and 26.

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Hear the word of the Lord **thanks be to God.**

The Psalm for today is Psalm 132, beginning at verse 10 to 18.

For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one.

¹¹ **The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:**

"One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever.”

¹³ **For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,**

¹⁴ “This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

¹⁵ **I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.**

¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.

¹⁷ **“Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one.**

¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown.”

Glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as in the beginning, so now and forever. Amen.

**The second reading comes from the letter to the Hebrews,
chapter 2 verses 5 to 9.**

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?

⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Song: Let there be love

Let there be love shared
among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now your love
sweep this nation,
cause us Oh Lord to arise.

Give us a fresh understanding
of brotherly love that is real,
let there be love
shared among us,
let there be love.

Repeat

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The Gospel of our Lord, according to Luke, Chapter 2, commencing at verse 22 to 40.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

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The Message: You are a living stone!

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- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
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in the name of Christ. Amen.

Devotional for New Year: Time for a Spring Clean of your heart?



All of us recognise the need for our homes to undergo a thorough and extensive spring clean – but what about our hearts? Do not our hearts need a spring clean as well?

It is not until you start to sort through the three boxes of what should be thrown away, given away and held onto that you realise how important this process really is.

And what better time to do this spring clean, but at the beginning of the new year! This devotional will continue for the first few weeks of 2024.



Next Sunday at Southlakes

7th January | Epiphany

Are you on?

Deacon: Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Cantors

**1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 |
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Prayers and Intercessions:

Please
refer to
latest
roster.



First Sunday after Christmas



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The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188

1st Sunday after

Christmas

9 am

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We acknowledge the triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth and God's ownership of all things (Psalm 24:1). In God's sovereignty, God has allowed other groups to migrate to these shores. We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now.

Welcome, praise and thanksgiving to God

The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory.

Let the word of God dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sentence

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

Prayer of Approach

Let us pray.

Gracious God, we humbly thank you for life and health and safety, for freedom to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life. But above all, we praise you for our Saviour Jesus Christ, for his death and resurrection; for the gift of your Spirit; and for the hope of sharing in your glory. Fill our hearts with all joy and believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening Song: O Come all ye faithful

1 O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye
to Bethlehem!

Come, and behold Him,
born the King of angels!
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him;
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ, the Lord!

2 True God of true God,
Light of light eternal,
lo, he abhors not
the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created.

O come, let us adore Hi

3 See how the shepherds
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks,
draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps.

O come, let us adore Him

6 Sing, choirs of angels;
sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens
of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
all glory in the highest!

O come, let us adore Him

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Collect of the Day

Saving God, whose Son Jesus was presented in the temple and was acclaimed the glory of Israel and the light of the nations; grant that in him we may be presented to you and in the world may reflect his glory; who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Ministry of the Word

Heavenly Father, as we listen to your Word, grant to us ears that hear and eyes that see what the Spirit is saying to our hearts. May your Word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory. **Amen.**

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 61, commencing and verse 18 to 20 and 26.

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

² The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

³ You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Hear the word of the Lord **thanks be to God.**

The Psalm for today is Psalm 132, beginning at verse 10 to 18.

For the sake of your servant David, do not reject your anointed one.

¹¹ **The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:**

"One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever.”

¹³ **For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,**

¹⁴ “This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

¹⁵ **I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.**

¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing for joy.

¹⁷ **“Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one.**

¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown.”

Glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as in the beginning, so now and forever. Amen.

**The second reading comes from the letter to the Hebrews,
chapter 2 verses 5 to 9.**

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?

⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels;
you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet.”

In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Song: Let there be love

Let there be love shared
among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now your love
sweep this nation,
cause us Oh Lord to arise.

Give us a fresh understanding
of brotherly love that is real,
let there be love
shared among us,
let there be love.

Repeat

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The Gospel of our Lord, according to Luke, Chapter 2, commencing at verse 22 to 40.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

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³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

This is the Gospel of our Lord, **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Apostles' Creed

**We believe in one God, who made and loves all that is.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who
was born, lived, died and rose again, and is coming to call
all to account.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, who calls, equips and sends
out God's people and brings all things to their true end.**

This is our faith, the faith of the Church:

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Message: You are a living stone!

Greetings!

Well it's the last message for 2023, and I pray it helps us all in our life's journeys, as we continue to say yes to God's calling on us as people of faith.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we reflect on Paul's letter to the Galatians, it is one of most moving of Paul's letters to the churches. It is clear that Paul is fighting for his calling and the fight is partly for himself, because if he is wrong, and God has not called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, then his whole life is wasted.

More importantly, it is for his converts, because if Paul has mistaken his vocation, then he has misled all those Gentiles who have given their lives to Christ through his preaching.

His argument is passionate, personal and we could say intricately involved. There are passages of personal history, interspersed with technical and not always transparent pieces of scriptural analysis. There are calm and carefully reasoned passages, side by side with passages that are derogatory. Our reading in Chapter 4 is at the heart of Paul's whole argument.

It is hard for us today to hear the real pain and joy in this passage about sonship, but it speaks powerfully of what Paul has given up, and why.

- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
- He was one of God's chosen people, an inheritor of the promises made to Abraham & David, automatically 'one of the family'.

Paul was clearly not alone in finding Jesus's preaching deeply threatening to that sense of being right with God. The Gospels show us that many of the religious leaders who met Jesus, hated him, and rejected all that he said and demonstrated about God.

Paul's own rejection of Jesus led him to help in violent persecution of Jesus' followers, which only ended with his meeting with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. When Paul finally accepts that his hostility towards Christians is a hostility towards God, he steps instantly out of his privileged insider's relationship with God.

So when, here in Galatians, Paul talks about our '**adoption**' as God's children, there is a complicated and moving dynamic going on.

Once, Paul would have assumed that he was a child of God, and heir to God's promises, simply because of who he was and where he was born.

But now he accepts in gratitude from God's hands what he once thought was his by right!

Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

If we think that we already are a child of God, or that we don't need any teaching about how to be a child of God, or that God is bound to choose us as his child and reject others, then we have not begun to understand what only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

Paul saw, in humility and joy, the huge shift that happens when God sends his only Son.

Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

Our Gospel reading from St Luke, tells us Mary, begins to see it too.

Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son's cradle and demand a part in his birth! She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all!

'But I thought God's messenger and God's meaning was a gift to me,' Mary thought, 'and now I find he has been telling half the world.'

Before Mary has even started to be able to cling to, possess, to believe herself the only 'favoured one', the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her 'gripping fingers', and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it.

Quietly, 'treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart', Mary names her son.

No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph's, but the name the angelic messenger gave her.

God does not belong even to us, who love him and yet **He** is a gift that we can share.

May we find direction and purpose, in an unshakable trust in our good God and Father.

He has visited us with His light.

May we never walk in darkness.

Amen.

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**Heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have broken your holy laws
and have left undone what we ought not have done.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Promise of Forgiveness

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live. In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Christmas Bowl Prayer for all

In Colossians we read: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray for all those whom we have met through the stories of the Christmas Bowl. We offer you our words and deeds, our money and our hope as we offer our thanks for these opportunities to learn and to give. Bless the work of Act for Peace and all its partners in places of need, that your vision of a renewed world of peace and justice may be fulfilled. **Amen.**

Prayers and Intercessions

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your beloved children give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal.

We conclude by praying as our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Commitment to live out our worship of the Lord

Living God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

**Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people, in
the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Song: Joy to the World

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

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When we reflect on Paul's letter to the Galatians, it is one of most moving of Paul's letters to the churches. It is clear that Paul is fighting for his calling and the fight is partly for himself, because if he is wrong, and God has not called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, then his whole life is wasted.

More importantly, it is for his converts, because if Paul has mistaken his vocation, then he has misled all those Gentiles who have given their lives to Christ through his preaching.

His argument is passionate, personal and we could say intricately involved. There are passages of personal history, interspersed with technical and not always transparent pieces of scriptural analysis. There are calm and carefully reasoned passages, side by side with passages that are derogatory. Our reading in Chapter 4 is at the heart of Paul's whole argument.

It is hard for us today to hear the real pain and joy in this passage about sonship, but it speaks powerfully of what Paul has given up, and why.

- All through his childhood and early adulthood, Paul would have believed that he was special, because of his relationship with God.
- This relationship was not anything he chose or opted into, but was his right, because he was a Jew.
- He was one of God's chosen people, an inheritor of the promises made to Abraham & David, automatically 'one of the family'.

Paul was clearly not alone in finding Jesus's preaching deeply threatening to that sense of being right with God. The Gospels show us that many of the religious leaders who met Jesus, hated him, and rejected all that he said and demonstrated about God.

Paul's own rejection of Jesus led him to help in violent persecution of Jesus' followers, which only ended with his meeting with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. When Paul finally accepts that his hostility towards Christians is a hostility towards God, he steps instantly out of his privileged insider's relationship with God.

So when, here in Galatians, Paul talks about our '**adoption**' as God's children, there is a complicated and moving dynamic going on.

Once, Paul would have assumed that he was a child of God, and heir to God's promises, simply because of who he was and where he was born.

But now he accepts in gratitude from God's hands what he once thought was his by right!

Yes, Paul says, we are children of God, but only because God chooses us, adopts us and makes us his own.

We do not have any automatic right to call God 'Father', but God the Holy Spirit, in his mercy, comes to us, and teaches us how to become children of God.

By ourselves, we do not even know the words that describe the relationship. Only God knows what this profound thing, 'sonship' is and only he can teach us its words and meaning.

What Paul preaches to the Gentiles is what he has learnt himself, the hard way: ***you can be a child of God, but only if you accept it in gratitude, from God's own hand.***

If we think that we already are a child of God, or that we don't need any teaching about how to be a child of God, or that God is bound to choose us as his child and reject others, then we have not begun to understand what only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

Paul saw, in humility and joy, the huge shift that happens when God sends his only Son.

Paul saw that all other relationships based on 'rights' have to be reworked, in the light of this relationship that we are offered, to which we respond in gratitude and obedience, or not at all.

Our Gospel reading from St Luke, tells us Mary, begins to see it too.

Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son's cradle and demand a part in his birth! She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all!

'But I thought God's messenger and God's meaning was a gift to me,' Mary thought, 'and now I find he has been telling half the world.'

Before Mary has even started to be able to cling to, possess, to believe herself the only 'favoured one', the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her 'gripping fingers', and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it.

Quietly, 'treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart', Mary names her son.

No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph's, but the name the angelic messenger gave her.

God does not belong even to us, who love him and yet **He** is a gift that we can share.

May we find direction and purpose, in an unshakable trust in our good God and Father.

He has visited us with His light.

May we never walk in darkness.

Amen.

Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

**Heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have broken your holy laws
and have left undone what we ought not have done.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Promise of Forgiveness

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live. In response to his call we acknowledge our sins. God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, you have sent among us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindle in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Christmas Bowl Prayer for all

In Colossians we read: whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we pray for all those whom we have met through the stories of the Christmas Bowl. We offer you our words and deeds, our money and our hope as we offer our thanks for these opportunities to learn and to give. Bless the work of Act for Peace and all its partners in places of need, that your vision of a renewed world of peace and justice may be fulfilled. **Amen.**

Prayers and Intercessions

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your beloved children give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal.

We conclude by praying as our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Commitment to live out our worship of the Lord

Living God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our meeting together.

**Take us and use us to love and serve you and all people, in
the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, working in you what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Closing Song: Joy to the World

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world!
The Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat
the sounding joy

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Devotional for New Year: Time for a Spring Clean of your heart?



All of us recognise the need for our homes to undergo a thorough and extensive spring clean – but what about our hearts? Do not our hearts need a spring clean as well?

It is not until you start to sort through the three boxes of what should be thrown away, given away and held onto that you realise how important this process really is.

And what better time to do this spring clean, but at the beginning of the new year! This devotional will continue for the first few weeks of 2024.



Next Sunday at Southlakes

7th January | Epiphany

Are you on?

Deacon: Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Cantors

**1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 |
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Prayers and Intercessions:

Please
refer to
latest
roster.



First Sunday after Christmas



Thank you!

In a world that often feels divided, you've come together with churches across Australia to stand alongside those uprooted by conflict and disaster. Thank you for standing with Act for Peace's local partners to bring practical care – as well as hope, peace, joy, love and light – to people in urgent need around the world.

By joining together through the Christmas Bowl, you are helping build a world where all people have a safe place to belong. **Thank you.**



CALL: 1800 025 101 VISIT: actforpeace.org.au/christmasbowl

The Christmas appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. ABN 86 619 970 188