

INTERACT

Quarterly

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Endeavour Hills Uniting Church Mission Statement

The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church...

a worshipping, nurturing, learning community...

an open door, reaching out to show Christ's face to all.

'Together We Grow.'



ENDEAVOUR HILLS UNITING CHURCH

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Our Website

The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church web site maintenance is overseen by Church Council. Please send all correspondence etc. to the Secretary, Judy Hopkins.

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Please note:

The views in the articles included in this publication are not necessarily those held by the Endeavour Hills Uniting Church.

FROM THE MINISTER

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7

The end of 2017 is approaching, and we head towards the season of Advent and Christmas. Luke recounts the Christmas story and how Mary had to give birth in a stable as there was no room... no room for them...no vacancy...no place; words that still seem to hang close, even today.

In a world that seeks to crowd Jesus out, where busyness abounds, and hearts are stirred to focus on other things, it can be hard sometimes to choose to keep Him first. It's all too easy to get caught up in the whole hurried dash of the holidays, and to give our attention to what seems more urgent. Our focus gets blurred; and the most important gets pushed aside.

It takes an active and daily choice to put Christ first, especially in a culture that says you're too busy to focus there, or that life is too full...and there's no more room.

May God help us to choose wisely as to what voices we listen to, and where we give our attention today. He is the One who brings true meaning to Christmas. He is the One who brings real peace in this all-too-often hectic season. He is the only One worthy of our time and attention as we slow down the maddening rush around our lives.

We can know all of this in our heads, but may He help us to really believe it in our hearts...and choose to live it out this season.

Making room for Him, first.

Robin Yang





Carol Service

Sunday December 17th

7.15 pm Orchestral Music

7.30 pm Christmas Carol Service

Christmas Eve Service

Saturday December 24th

11.00 pm

at Narre Warren North Uniting Church

1 Main St, Narre Warren North

Christmas Day Service

Sunday December 25th

9 am

THE ADVENT SEASON

Advent is traditionally celebrated during the four Sundays before Christmas as a means of preparing our hearts for the miraculous birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The word Advent is derived from the Latin *adventus*, which means coming.

“It’s telling and re-telling the story of why God came into this world, the Incarnation, and pointing and looking forward to His coming again,” notes Rev. Marty O’Rourke.

Christians typically celebrate the season by lighting the ceremonial Advent candles and reading Scriptures. As the candles are lit, the Christmas story is told from its foretelling in Isaiah to its culmination in the second chapter of Luke. The Old Testament points to the promise of a Saviour.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9: 6, NIV).

The wreath is always in the shape of a circle to represent God’s eternity, His unending nature. The evergreens symbolize life. We as Christians have eternal life once we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Nestled inside the wreath of evergreens are five candles, each representing a significant aspect of the Christmas story. The first three candles are purple to represent preparation, the fourth candle is pink to represent joy, and the last is white to represent Christ.

On the first Sunday of Advent, the candle of prophecy and preparation is lit, and on the second Sunday, the candle of proclamation, remembering the angels who announced the Saviour. In the third week, we emphasize anticipation. For hundreds of years, godly men and women awaited the presence of the King, and what a joy it was for the lowly shepherds who first experienced the joyous news of Christ’s birth.

After the three weeks of preparation, the joy of the coming Saviour is celebrated with a pink candle. On this Sunday, we remember the expectation Mary felt as she had Emmanuel, God with us, pressing at her womb.

On Christmas Day, one last candle, the white candle, is lighted. Often the biggest of the five candles and centred in the middle of the wreath, this Christ candle marks the culmination of the promise of a coming Saviour. Celebrate the occasion with family prayer time, acknowledging the light of Christ not only in the world, but also in our hearts.



A CHRISTMAS HYMN

(To be sung to the tune of "The Ash Grove".)

When Joseph and Mary so wearily wended
Their way from their cottage in Nazareth's street,
Then slept with the oxen in Bethlehem's stable,
And laid in a manger their Baby so sweet,
Enduring discomfort and squalor and hardship,
Compelled by a merciless tyrant's decree,
Few were there on earth who in such tribulation
God's greatness and goodness and glory could see.

God's glory we see in the sun, moon and planets,
In river and ocean, in mountain and plain,
In flowers and butterflies, forests and gardens,
In moors with their heather and fields full of grain.
But angels sang "Glory" when in great privation
Our Lord came in Bethlehem's manger to lie;
For His greatest glory's the glory of loving,
That led Him to suffer, that led Him to die.

Lord, give us Your glory, the glory of loving,
A love for all people, the great and the small,
For saints and for sinners, for friends and for strangers,
For black folk and white, like Your love for us all,
A love like Your own that for others is ready
To suffer great hardship if that should ensue;
You said that whenever we love other people
We also, in doing so show love to You.

Roland Howorth.

Rathmell, North Yorkshire

This was a winner in the hymn competition in October 2000 organised by Settle Methodist Circuit. The theme was simply Christmas, and the tune had to be The Ash Grove.

HAVE YOURSELVES A MERRY MATERIAL CHRISTMAS-TIME!

How “Christian” is your Christmas? What is the relevance of getting and giving all this stuff? Rowan Williams, a former Archbishop of Canterbury has said, “The heart of the Christmas message is that



God takes our material world completely seriously. He doesn't just send a message, he comes to live in the physical world in the flesh and blood of a real person, Jesus.” Christianity is the most material of all religions (unless you include the new world religion of consumerism!). We are given good material things to enjoy and we should be grateful for them. But the fact that God not only made the world but walked about in it, eating and drinking, also means that we should have reverence for it.

Another quote from Rowan Williams says, “If we believe that God takes the environment seriously, that he can speak through the physical things of the world, we are horribly wrong if we think we can ignore these environmental matters. The good news God sends at Christmas has to be good news for the whole world. If we start thinking about protecting our environment properly we shall be reflecting the way God himself looks at the world into which he came at Christmas”. We have to find a balance between enjoying the good things of our material world and taking from the earth what it cannot afford to give us. This isn't easy! Part of my spiritual journey is to try to find the right balance. Christmas, when according to the carol “The earth is now a heaven become”, is a good time to give some thought to how we can express God's love to the whole world as well as to our nearest and dearest.

December Top Tip: Cut down on waste by giving tickets (to the theatre, concert or sporting event etc.) as a present. You could also give your time by going along too!

RECLAIM CHRISTMAS



Have a read through these twelve "C"s of Christmas. Which do you want to keep?

Consumption: the engine of economic growth which enslaves us and treats creation as a mere commodity there for our use.

Commercialism: that which sees the price of everything and the value of nothing and sees, in Christmas, one sole opportunity: profits.

Covetousness: the envy that drives so much materialistic pursuit and which is expressly singled out in the Ten Commandments for special attention.

Carbon: the by-product of so much of our modern over-consuming lifestyle.

Climate Change: our great uncharted experiment with the biosphere. Threats to creation loom large if we don't awaken ourselves to the call to go back to some basic principles and live more simply, more sustainably.

Chaos: the disordered world that awaits if we do not live accordingly within the limits of God's precepts.

Creation: God's marvellous work, of which we are a small, but key part. God works 'ex nihilo', creating out of nothing. Even before the advent of humans in the Genesis creation narrative, God looks on at each passing day's work and declares all that he sees as "good".

Covenant: God's faithfulness pledged first to Noah and then through Abraham, resulting in the coming of "God-with-us": Emmanuel, promised to Israel.

Community: a true focus outside of ourselves and immediate families directing us to be mindful of those in need around us.

Carols: with their multiple and joyous references to the humility of the Christ-child story.

Candles: four for each of the weeks of Advent, signifying the coming light that will shine in the darkness and which "darkness cannot overpower." (John 1)

Christ: on whom all our waiting is centred. In the simplicity and modesty of his birth, we find God's word among us with a clear message: "Live simply."

From Operation Noah's 'Reclaim Christmas' campaign.

QUOTES & COMMENTS

The reason angels can fly is that they take themselves lightly.

G. K. Chesterton

The new minister was intrigued to see an announcement in the church newsletter for a “Greening of the Church” service in early December.

“Do you mean a Hanging of the Greens?” the minister asked.

“Yes,” came the reply. “But we changed the name after the Green family complained.”

Don’t cry because it’s over, but smile because it happened.

Dr. Seuss

Joy is the true gift of Christmas, not the expensive gifts that call for time and money. We can communicate this joy simply: with a smile, a kind gesture, a little help, or forgiveness. And the joy we give will certainly come back to us . . . Let us pray that this presence of the liberating joy of God shines forth in our lives.

Pope Benedict XVI

Take time to be aware that in the very midst of our busy preparations for the celebration of Christ’s birth in ancient Bethlehem, Christ is reborn in the Bethlehems of our homes and daily lives. Take time, slow down, be still, be awake to the Divine Mystery that looks so common and so ordinary yet is wondrously present.

Edward Hays

A three year old once gave this reaction to her Christmas dinner: “I don’t like the turkey, but I like the bread he ate.”

What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies.

– Aristotle, Greek Philosopher

For You at Christmas

WITH A PRAYER

BY HELEN STEINER RICE



*Bless us, Lord, this Christmas
with quietness of mind—
Teach us to be patient
and always to be kind.
Show us that in quietness
we can feel Your presence near,
Filling us with joy and peace
throughout the coming year.*

A PLEASANT SUNDAY EVENING

Years ago on a Sunday evening there was a program on the ABC that ran for half-an-hour. Great hymns of faith sung by wonderful choirs were introduced by A E Floyd, the long-time organist at St Paul's Cathedral.



I can still hear his rather quaint but lovely voice. I used to listen to it before I walked into our church next door to take the evening service. One hymn, often repeated, resonated with me. "The day you gave us, Lord, is ended."

Yet when Sunday worship is over and night falls, the church is still unsleeping. All around the world as the new day dawns, worship continues. Prayer is never silent. Fresh voices are praising God and telling of wondrous things happening in his Name.

Sometimes we feel our witness in the world is tiny. But together, with men, women and children around the world we are building the Kingdom. Whatever the hour, day or night, Kingdom people are praising God.

Reflection: Read TIS 458 and may the last verse of Tillerton's wonderful hymn inspire and encourage each of us.

*So be it, Lord; your throne shall never,
Like earth's proud empires, pass away;
Your kingdom stands, and grows forever,
Till all your creatures own your sway.*

Bill Pugh

MARY THE PROPHET



Annunciation: *Phillipe de Champaigne*

The bible is full of stories of God calling prophets, and their responses. Often, they are reluctant: Moses claimed to be a nobody, Isaiah said, “I am a person of unclean lips,” and Jeremiah said, “I am too young.”

Yet the prophet Mary not only says “let it be, according to your word” (or, “I’m ready to serve” according to The Message) but bursts into song, proclaiming the goodness of God.

At this time of year, we see Mary a lot, usually dressed in blue, in Christmas cards, manger scenes, and nativity pageants. But do we really notice her? This young, previously unknown teenager from Nazareth made an amazing speech (Lk 1:47-54) and – in addition to birthing the Messiah – did a number of other powerful acts in her life as well.

In the midst of this busy season, pause and pay a little attention to Mary. Read her story, and listen to her challenge.

HANGING OF THE GREENS

A common Advent tradition in the northern hemisphere is known as the Hanging of the Greens. This is an intriguing blend of ancient symbolisms adapted over the years to proclaim a variety of powerful messages.



Ancient Romans used evergreens as symbols of peace, joy, and victory. Their long-lasting colour and inherent strength suggested long life and exuberance. Early Christians saw in these same branches a symbol of the risen Christ, and would place evergreen boughs in their windows to symbolize that Christ was present in their home. However, some early Christian leaders condemned the practice, believing that it was too similar to Roman imperial customs.

The peoples of Northern Europe had many customs connected with evergreens in the wintertime before Christianity arrived there. In a land of long, cold winters, there was a fear that the sun would disappear and never return. Believing that evergreens held magical powers, people brought them indoors hoping they would help bring back the sun. Over time, the evergreens came to symbolize the presence of new life of Christ, whose birth was celebrated in the northern winter.

Holly became closely tied to Christmas and Christian symbolism. Some people saw it as a symbolic “burning bush” arriving at the time of year when we celebrated the birth of Jesus, the “new Moses”. Others saw it as a symbol of Mary whose being glowed with the presence of the Holy Spirit symbolized by the colour red. Still others saw its prickly leaves and red berries as symbols of the crown of thorns and drops of blood. Lest we get carried away in a story of pure joy, the holly tree reminds us of a larger picture.

Cedar in many cultures is a symbol of royalty, and the sweet smell of pine and other evergreens is a reminder of the frankincense brought by the magi.

As churches, homes, and other places get adorned with greenery during Advent and Christmas, look beyond the decorations to the powerful symbolism that can take us ever deeper into the story and mystery that is the birth of Jesus Christ in our world.

A NEW YEAR!



365 days! New classes at school, new friends, new teachers, new subjects, new ways of discovering and learning. So much to look forward to.

There is plenty of time, plenty of years, when we are young. For senior citizens, time seems so short. Where have all the years gone? Our bodies are not young anymore; we feel more aches and pains. We want to make the most of what we have left by the grace of God.

Tempus fugit (Latin for ‘time flies’) were philosophical sentiments of the Roman poet, Virgil. Oldies understand that. Jesus had a different way. He did not count the days – in fact he did not have many. He said, “I have come that you might have life – life in all its fullness.”

Each year we have days, hours and minutes to keep us busy. But for the Christian, life is over and above calendar measurement. It is a call to a new way of living every day, and extending to life eternal. Here and now we begin that experience by loving and serving Jesus every day. A happy new year with all the riches and blessings of the new life!

Reflection: The Psalmist had some special advice for a new year: “Lord, teach how short life is that we might become wise.” (*Psalms 90:12*)

And let us remember the promise of Jesus to the faithful: “Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the Kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world.” (*Matthew 25:34*).

Bill Pugh



LAUGHTER

It puts things in perspective,
it makes everybody's day,
It keeps us young at heart
and gives us strength along the way.

It's for children of all ages,
'cause there's really nothing to it,
It's particularly fun
when we are not supposed to do it.

It's the one all-purpose medicine,
there's just no doubt about it.
Laughter makes the world go round—
what would we do without it !

Contributions to Interact

Any material you may have to be included in Interact may be sent in one of two ways:

1. e-mail (preferred method) to interact@ehuc.org.au putting “Interact” in the subject line
2. leave in the green Interact folder which is located on the stand to the right of the kitchen window.

Your contributions of up to **450 words** are very welcome, **BUT please include your name, phone number &/or email address in case it is necessary to contact you.** Material should be submitted by **12 noon** on the deadline dates indicated below:

Issue	Deadline	Publication Date
Autumn	18th February 2018	4th March 2018
Winter	20th May 2018	3rd June 2018
Spring	19th August 2018	2nd September 2018
Summer	18th November 2018	2nd December 2018