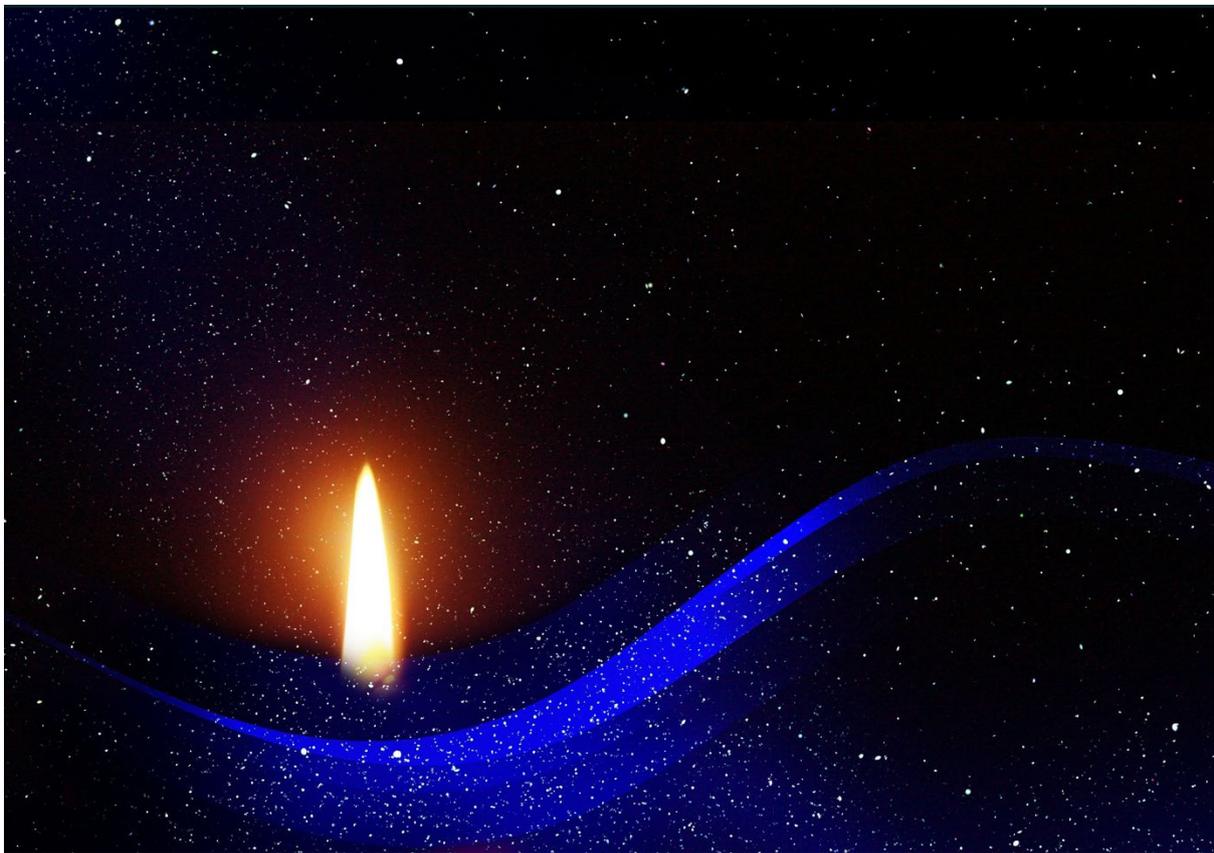


Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project

Advent 2022

Sermon Notes



*God of tenderness and compassion,
open our hearts to reach out to all who have been created by you.
Give us and others courage to hope for peace.
Lead us, loving Lord, as we work towards acting now
for an end to domestic and family violence.
Amen.*



From the National Anglican Family Violence Research Report

“Let’s bring it into the light”

“None of us want to face up to it, none of us want to think this is happening, but it is. And I know, from our experience as a church, that we know that it is. And so, (being a clergy) is a platform where I can actually say ‘let’s bring it into the light’.”

Clergyperson in focus group

From The Foreword of The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Statement 2022-23

Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse

“The teaching of Christ urges us to promote relationships marked by respect and freedom rather than coercion and control. The message of the Gospel is not a message of domination of one person over another but a message of mutual esteem and kindness.”

**Archbishop Timothy Costelloe
SDB, President, Australian
Catholic Bishops Conference**



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7 November, 2022

Dear friends in Christ,

Members of the Commission for prevention of Domestic and Family Violence have prepared resources for use in churches in the four weeks leading up to Christmas to raise awareness that not all families enjoy peaceful, joyful celebrations at this time of year and to be aware that, sadly, some of these families are amongst our communities. We believe, that to preach about the alarming statistics which are on the increase may give hope and courage for these people to seek help, speak up, be alert to the needs in the community around them.

Please use these and adjust them to suit your particular situation. They include –

- Sermon Notes including current statistics
- Prayers, Benedictions
- Song/hymn suggestions
- Activities for children and youth
- Personal story of financial abuse and 'gaslighting'
- Scripture suggestions from Lectionary for Advent Year A

We hope that together we may bring hope and love to many hurting people.

Yours sincerely

Rev David Baker
General Secretary
Queensland Churches Together



Week 1

Theme: **Stay Awake! Be Alert! Be aware!**

Notes for church leaders:

- You may wish to set up a Wreath with four candles and light one on the first week, then two on the second week etc.
- At the lighting of the candle you may wish to use some statistics from these notes to highlight the issues of domestic and family violence.
- Children in your worship service may wish to make a Peace Rose from tissues (See instructions p 23) or a Prayer chain made from strips of coloured paper and stapled and looped together.
- Your teens may wish to practice some still statues showing peace gestures

Scripture

Isaiah 2:1-5 ... *that the Lord may teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths; ...these will hammer swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles.*

Psalms 121:1-2, 4-5, 6-9 *'Peace be to your homes! May peace reign in your walls ...*

Romans 13:11-14 - *let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of dark Let us live decently as people do in the daytime.*

Matthew 24:37-44 Jesus said to his disciples: ... *"So stay awake because you do not know when your master is coming.*

Music Suggestions

Prayer of St Francis (Make me a channel of your Peace)

A New Heart for a New World (Trisha Watts)

O Come O Come Emmanuel (Traditional)

Christ be our Light (Bernadette Farrell)

A Voice cries out in the wilderness (Michael Joncas)

Maranatha Come Lord Jesus

Sermon Notes

It is a little over 4 weeks to Christmas when we Christians celebrate the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, as an innocent, defenceless child and as we make our preparations for this wonderful family time, it is important to be aware that not all families enjoy peaceful and joyful get-togethers. For some, the extra financial pressure, stress, being with family where hurts have not been dealt with, school holidays, the heat and lack of resources may push some people to violence and



abuse. Some of these people might be members of Christian communities, who terrorise their families in their homes, but might be charming towards others. The family members being abused, live in fear and shame and will often deny that the behaviour of the abuser is not normal. They will also make excuses for the abuser and go to great lengths to convince others that all is well.

As family members, neighbours, friends, today's scripture can be a reminder to be alert, to be informed and aware and to be prepared to offer support. Statistically in Queensland, one person is killed at the hands of an intimate partner – estranged or otherwise – every week. These are the cases that come across our News feeds, airwaves or television screens, but for many more, the suffering happens behind closed doors and in the dark, and while not resulting in death, can be as devastating. The harm to children in such cases is incalculable and the cost to the community is astronomical.

Members of the Joint Churches Commission for prevention of Domestic and Family violence have initiated this campaign to raise awareness of this largely hidden blight on our families, neighbourhoods and communities. Please take a brochure if you would like more information about the various ways some people may be being abused.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leader: Oh God of mercy and compassion, we long for your coming. Help us to be alert to the needs of others as we pray ...

1. For those who suffer in silence in abusive relationships ... Gracious God hear us.
2. For communities to offer safe places to go for those wanting to leave abusive relationships. Gracious God hear us.
3. For children who witness violence in their homes, that they may find kindness, compassion and support to tell their stories. Gracious God hear us.
4. For authorities such as Police, Ambulance workers, Medical staff, Social Workers to receive more support so that they may perform their jobs to the best of their abilities. Gracious God hear us.
5. For those who work for peace and non-violence in our society ... Gracious God hear us.

Benediction

Gracious God, as we prepare for happy holidays and family celebrations at the birth of your Son, Jesus, please help us to remember to be alert to the needs of others who might be struggling under the weight of shame and secrecy. In your mercy grant us peace and hope to be your light to others. Amen.



Article from Focus Magazine by Felicity Bailey

The Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project (JCDVPP) was established all the way back in 1991 with the specific aims of both informing and resourcing Churches on the serious social issue of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) in its various forms.

My introduction to this dynamic and passionate group was in 2016, two years after my very acrimonious separation from my emotionally and financially abusive first husband. I was desperately trying to get through and over the aftermath of our failed traditional Christian marriage. I had moved parishes to escape all connection and knowledge fellow congregants had of my past. My new female parish priest was offering some one-to-one sessions and I very reluctantly decided to put my name down for one of these, having already sought some professional help; read a multitude of books and publications on this subject; and, listened to many well-meaning, but inadequately thought-out sermons on this complex subject matter.

During one of our subsequent one-to-one sessions she informed me that a previous mentor and friend of hers, The Rev'd Canon Richard Tutin, was in the process of revitalising a Commission of Queensland Churches Together (QCT) to review and help Churches to mitigate this most alarming and rising social issue. She gently suggested that I meet with him to discuss how my possible involvement with this re-emerging group could help to provide both healing and the prospect of future healthy relationships.

Little did I realise what that first meeting would mean for me and what a positive and powerful example of how the appropriate assistance I received from my Church would be to others. The effects of DFV are often devastating to not only every member of the household directly involved but also to their extended family, friends and the wider community.

The Church is in a unique position of being able to offer practical, emotional and spiritual help to all who are impacted by DFV, from initial contact right through to the ongoing emotional and spiritual support often required long term by victims and reforming perpetrators, when the need



for more specialised and emergency assistance has either passed or run its course.

The recently released findings from the National Anglican Family Violence Project research on DFV provides solid evidence of what we at JCDVPP have always known anecdotally: that DFV doesn't discriminate nor does involvement or identification as a Christian offer any protection from it. It is sadly all around us.

*We are so pleased to announce that The JCDVPP has just released a newly revised and updated copy of their popular DFV and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) booklet titled, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly – Questions Women ask about Relationships and Christian Beliefs*. We have purposefully focused on updating the following: terminology and forms of DFV; significance of attempted strangulation; importance of a safety plan for the victim and children; and, emerging focus on coercive control.*

It is specifically designed to assist victims and their families, clergy, pastoral carers and interested others through identification and emphasis on the importance of seeking professional and specialist assistance in order to help victims make sense of what is happening to them and make informed decisions about the kind of future they want for themselves and their children.

To purchase copies of this newly revised and updated edition of this vital booklet "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly – Questions Women ask about Relationships and Christian Beliefs", please contact the Queensland Churches Together office by calling (07) 3369 6792 or emailing admin@qct.org.au.



Week 2

Theme: **John the Baptist Prepares the Way for Peace**

Scripture

Isaiah 11.1-10;

Psalms 72.1-7, 18-20;

Romans 15.4-13;

Matthew 3.1-

Music Suggestions

Be Still, for the Presence of the Lord – Mission Praise 50

Beauty for Brokenness – MP 806; Together in Song 690 – very powerful

Inspired by Love and Anger – TiS 674 – very powerful

Jesus Christ is Waiting – TiS 665 – very powerful

Make me a Channel of Your Peace – MP 456; TiS 607

Christ Be our Light – Bernadette Farrell (words and music in Catholic hymn books and on YouTube) – good processional hymn

Father, I place into Your hands – Mission Praise 133

Be Still and Know – MP 48

Do Not Be Afraid – MP 115

God is our Strength and Refuge (Psalm 46) MP 188; TiS 28 (Dambusters)

Hear My Cry, O God MP 227

Hear My Prayer, O Lord MP 1051

I Need Thee Every Hour MP 288

O Lord, Hear My Prayer (Taizé) MP 908; TiS 741 (*change 'my' to 'our')*

Reach out and Touch the Lord MP 569

The Screams of Police-car sirens (TiS) – very powerful

Kyrie Eleison TiS 735 (Taizé) and 736. Needs a cantor/choir (Ukrainian Orthodox)

Nada te turbe [Nothing Can Trouble] (Taizé in Spanish and English) TiS 739



Sermon

Last Sunday was the first day of the new Church Year. We explored God's message of Christian Hope. Today we develop this theme into peace for everyone. In our reading from Matthew Chapter 3 we meet John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, who heralds the coming of Israel's long-awaited Messiah with "*good news for many and angry words for some*" (John Bell, *Advent Ring*, Together in Song 289). John is preparing for the Messiah by baptising people as they repent of their sins. The Messiah's arrival will bring the long-awaited Kingdom of God, God's reign of justice, peace, joy and love.¹ .

Matthew employs powerful symbols of a path, water, fire and an axe to prepare us for God's pathfinder, who will preach a message of repenting of our sins and turning to Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. John the Baptist is an alternative lifestyle, a prophet, who finds God in his habitat, the wilderness (Greek: *eremos*) east and south east of Jerusalem. A radical 'greenie', he sports wild hair and a beard, lives from locusts and honey and is clothed in an animal skin. Bursting through the bushes like Costa, on ABC's *Gardening Australia*, John, like the prophet Isaiah, speaks for God as God's mouthpiece to the Israelites and to us. They are urged to straighten their life path, and clean up their 'stuff' both externally and internally. Today this message for us today is to spend more time in Bible reading, meditation and prayer in order to hear God's message to us in the four weeks of Advent which lead to Christmas. This week we are promised "the peace of God which passes all understanding" if we respond to God's call to us.

Yet John is not only a voice for the voiceless but also a doer, someone who will both call us and warn us to do God's will in this time of preparation for the Christ Event when the Messiah comes to earth as a vulnerable person who is God enfleshed among us. His catch-cry, "*Repent and believe*" encapsulates his message as he urges us to turn from our sins and turn to God then follow Him. As a sacrament of their respond to God's call, the people confess their sins and are baptised in the Jordan River, which at its source is pure and clean. John plunges them into the water and raises them to new life and a new beginning as redeemed people of God. Yet it is more than that; it is both a symbolic cleansing and a sign that God is transforming ancient history, Israel and the cosmos. The River Jordan is familiar to them in terms of oral tradition as their ancestors crossed this very river from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land. Moreover, this ancient sacrament of baptism is available to everyone today if they seek, turn and follow Jesus sincerely.

The coming of the Messiah is life and world changing event as God seeks to defeat evil and establish by means of the person of the Messiah, the Kingdom or Reign of God, a different way of living in justice, peace, joy and love. It is the beginning of the gradual transformation of earth to its ultimate mingling with heaven ("on earth as in heaven" in The Lord's Prayer). John, God's forerunner and pathfinder, speaks from

¹ N.T. Wright, *Matthew For Everyone* Part 1, London: SPCK 2002, p.16



the heart; he knows what we need to hear. He speaks God's mind through his own mouth, an uncomfortable message involving cold mountain water to drown our old self so that we emerge cleansed and renewed, an axe to 'fell' the less desirable aspects of ourselves and a burning fire to destroy the chaff and keep only the corn, what is good and productive in us. John criticises the legalistic, arrogant, self-righteous Pharisees, the Saducees, who hypocritically worship law-keeping rather than the love of God. John demands genuine and total repentance and a commitment for life, no half measures.

The Messiah, too, will bring judgement as well as loving-kindness, so each person needs to be a fruit-bearing tree, not disposable chaff. Jesus Himself will sort corn from chaff, keeping the produce or fruit (our goodness) and incinerating the chaff (our 'stuff'). During Advent we work towards peace as we await Jesus' coming to fulfil God's promises which will blow God's Spirit throughout the world, bringing God's judgement on evil and receiving all who are penitent (sorry for their sins). How does God achieve this? By becoming truly human, identifying with us, by taking our place, sharing our penitence, living our lives and eventually dying our death. We shall witness that when Jesus, in solidarity with us, emerges from the waters of baptism filled with the Holy Spirit which is symbolised by the dove of peace.

Let us now turn to what God is calling you and me to do today. He is calling us to turn away from the frenetic pace of life, slow down and take sacred time and space to enter the silence and stillness in order to sense God's presence and listen to him rather than responding with the first thing which comes into our head. Let us take time to pray for those in dire need at this time, especially those experiencing Domestic and Family Violence. Not in my suburb, you may be thinking. Never. Wrong. DFV occurs in one out of four families in all suburbs regardless of status, assets, education and intelligence. Victims tend to suffer silently, unable to share it with others and subsisting in survival mode. The victim walks on eggshells while trying to work at the relationship while s/he cries out to be listened to, affirmed, heard and helped. S/he is often shamed and blamed for everything, His/her self-esteem is eroded. 'Who am I?' the victim asks. It is even happening under our very noses wherever we work and socialise. It even happens in most parishes and community groups.

Regrettably, key areas of society haven't a clue how to identify DFV or respond to it appropriately. Clergy are mostly unskilled while police utter platitudes such as "s/he's playing mind games with you"; s/he won't hurt you"; I know that: s/he told me." Social workers see so many cases that they are unable to discern and name acute cases from less serious family dynamics. Often, other professionals in the field cannot believe that DFV occurs and that no victims know how to deal with the issue. Money and education cannot fix things. Today we are urged to prepare for the 'advent' or coming of the Messiah by listening and showing we have listened with our heart while exercising compassion God's way: by acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly with our God.² It is then that victims can recover and eventually find the peace of God.

² Micah 6.8



As we journey through December to Christmas it is imperative that we be prayerfully aware of financial pressures and other tensions in households.

We can all contribute to peace by the way we think, respond and act as we follow Jesus' way of compassion. What the needy ask from us is not only for money and food from aid agencies so that they receive goods to keep their family alive but also for 'advocacy', our voice for the voiceless. God calls us to speak up, take a stand and challenge what is happening, so that each person is treated with respect, dignity and human rights. Pray daily for courage and hope to flow from us to others, so that the vulnerable are surrounded by loving, caring thoughts, which, with God, our Creator, Redeemer and Spirit can transform the world into God's just Kingdom of hope, peace, love and joy, our Advent focus.

How can you prepare for the coming of Jesus this year? What baggage do you need to burn? Which path needs straightening within your life? What dead wood in your heart needs felling before the shoot can grow into a branch?³ Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. As we continue to explore DFV and ways of responding to those who suffer from it, I encourage you to pray this prayer daily this week.

Let Us Pray: God of tenderness and compassion, open our hearts to reach out to all who have been created by you, giving us and others the courage to hope for peace. Lead us, loving Father, as we act now peace in the context of Domestic and Family Violence. **Amen.**

Source: N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone* Part 1, London: SPCK 2002; Rev'd Carol Palmer, sermon Advent to for Queensland Churches Together member parishes and other agencies.

Prayers

PRAYER: *God of tenderness and compassion, open our hearts to reach out to all who have been created by you. Give us and others courage to hope for peace. Lead us, loving Lord, as we work towards acting now for an end to domestic and family violence. Amen.*

PRAYER FOR OUR HOMES: *Be present, Living Christ, within us, your dwelling place and home, that this home may be one where our darkness is penetrated by your light, where our troubles are calmed by your peace, where our evil is redeemed by your love, where our pain is transformed in your suffering and where our dying is glorified in your risen life.*

Jim Cotter, *Prayer at Night's Approaching*, Cairns Publications Sheffield, 1997, p.20.

PRAYER FOR PEACE: *Wretched are those who are at war with themselves, who spread evil and division and hatred, seeking to dominate others: they breed their own downfall, and they never know trust and friendship. Blessed are those who*

³ Wright p.16-19



created reconciliation and goodwill wherever they go, returning good for evil: they are indeed the friends of God. (Cotter, p.31)

PRAYER FOR INNER PEACE: *O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works do proceed, give to your servants that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments, and also that by you, we being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.* (Cotter page 96)

Blessings

BLESSING 1: *To God the Creator who loved us first and gave this world to be our home: To God the Redeemer who loves us and by dying and rising pioneered the way of freedom: To God the Sanctifier who spreads the divine love in our hearts: be praise and glory for time and for eternity. The divine Spirit dwells in us: **Thanks be to God.*** (Cotter p.58)

BLESSING 2: *The blessing of God, Giver of Life, Bearer of Pain, Maker of Love, be with us now and always. The divine Spirit dwells in us: **Thanks be to God.*** (Cotter p.97)

BLESSING 3: *The blessing of God, the shalom of God, the wildness and the warmth of God, be among us now and always. The divine Spirit dwells in us: **Thanks be to God.*** (Cotter p.117)



Prevalence of DFV

Violence against women is a widespread problem in Australia.

Source: 2016 Personal Safety Survey (ABS, 2017)

Since the age of 15:

- Approximately one in four women (23% or 2.2 million) has **experienced at least one incident of violence by an intimate partner** (intimate partner = a current or previous partner with whom the respondent lives or has lived, or a current or former boyfriend, girlfriend or date with whom the respondent has not lived with).
- **One in six women** (17% or 1.6 million) has **experienced at least one incident of violence by a partner** (partner = a person whom the respondent lives with, or lived with at some point, in a married or de facto relationship).
- **Three in ten women** (30.5% or 2.85 million) have **experienced physical violence** (perpetrated by another person, irrespective of the type of relationship).
- **Approximately one in five women** (18% or 1.7 million) has **experienced sexual violence** (the occurrence, attempt or threat of sexual assault).
- **One in six women** (17% or 1.6 million) has **experienced an episode of stalking** (any unwanted contact or attention on more than one occasion, or multiple types of unwanted contact or behaviour experienced on one occasion, that could have caused fear or distress).
- **Approximately one in four women** (23% or 2.2 million) has **experienced emotional abuse by a partner**.

Across their lifetime:

- **One in two women** (53% or 5 million) has **experienced sexual harassment** (experienced or has been subjected to one or more selected behaviours which they found improper or unwanted, which made them feel uncomfortable, and/or were offensive due to their sexual nature).



Week 3

Worship Service Resource

Sunday 11 December 2022

Third Sunday of Advent

Lighting the Third candle of Advent as the candle of Peace

Today we light the candles of HOPE, PEACE, and JOY.

The candles are lit.

Sometimes the world feels dark and evil. We light the third candle of the advent wreath today to remind ourselves that God is with us every day and loves us with a powerful love. So, even when things are awful, we can rejoice.

Prayer: Gracious God, you came to us in human flesh and you abide with us in the Holy Spirit. Fill us with your joy, and help us shine as a light to the world. Through Jesus Christ, who makes our joy complete. Amen.

Call to Worship

Prayer of Approach 1 (pray together)

O God whose spirit is known by those whose hearts are thankful, and who makes cheerfulness a companion of strength, lift up our hearts, we pray, to a joyous confidence in your care. Guide us when we cannot see the way. Teach us to know that a shadow is only a shadow, because the light of eternal goodness shines behind the object of our fears. Where there is love in life, teach us to find it; help us to trust it and enable us to grow in the power of love. So may our lives bring comfort and encouragement to others. We ask it, in the name of Jesus Christ whose life is our light. Amen.

Prayer of Approach 2

God who approaches:
you gather the ignored,
 so you can accomplish the unexpected
 for a world which no longer cares;
with bread broken into pieces,
 you restore your shattered creation;
as you let go of your Child,
 our emptiness is filled
 with immeasurable grace.



Ever-new, always-scarred
Jesus of the forgotten:
through you,
 those whose voices are silenced
 hear the whispers of angels
 on hillsides and in shelters;
by you,
 those who are knocked over
 lead the way into your kingdom;
with you,
 those who wander in shadows
 are clasped tight in your love.

Breath of Advent:
you pour the promises of the Word
 into the shy and silent
 so they can carol of grace;
you stretch out your hand to all in despair's exile,
 to place them on the
 holy way of hope;
you gather up the scraps of our scattered fears,
 to build a new crib
 for a refugee family.

Come, God in Community, Holy in One,
come and lift us out of our fears into your joy.
Amen!

Lectionary Liturgies, Thom M. Shuman

Scripture

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalms 146:5-10 or Luke 1:46b-55

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

Sermon ideas

Isaiah:

God will bring joy to those who are suffering. God will make everything right. In the meantime, we are called to "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees." (35:3). Support those being abused and create for them safe spaces, until they are able to experience the joy of the Lord.



Psalm:

St. Francis prayed to be an instrument of God's peace, love, joy and hope. We could follow in his example and try to become instruments of God's realm by watching over the strangers and upholding those who are left without protection and abused.
(146:9)

Luke:

There have been times in history where God has brought justice to the oppressed. The birth of Jesus, that we are waiting for, is one occasion where we witness the in-breaking of God into human history to lift up the lowly, fill the hungry, and bring justice. If we are open like Mary to be a vessel for God to use, then peace, love, joy and hope will always prevail in our lives.

James:

While the farmer patiently waits for the crops, he does not sit idle. He prepares and protects the vulnerable crops from harmful and destructive things. In the same way we wait patiently preparing and protecting those who are vulnerable.

Matthew:

Jesus is the Messiah who will bring healing to all. John came before him to prepare the way for him. While we wait for Jesus the Christ to bring healing today to the oppressed, abused and suffering, who will take on the role of John and prepare the way for Christ to come? We hear Jesus say that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (11:11). I wonder if Jesus is talking about us preparing the way for the Christ.

Prayers of Intercession/Prayer of the Faithful

God of Advent,

As we light the candle of joy in our hearts,
may we walk in your light and rejoice in you.

God with us - Emmanuel,

Humanity waits in darkness longing for your light.

In the centre of all our pain, be the source of our joy.

As we wait for peace in the midst of turmoil,
Let your Spirit of hope be with us.

As we pray for families to be reunited,
Let your Spirit of love be with us.

As we pray for enemies to be reconciled,
Let your Spirit peace be with us.

As we pray for lands to be restored,
Let your Spirit justice be with us.



As we pray for kindness and community,
Let your Spirit joy be with us.

God of joy,

Renew our spirit and draw our hearts to you, so that the work that we do may not be a burden to us but a delight. Teach us to serve you and your people with a spirit of cheerfulness and gladness of children, delighting ourselves in you and rejoicing in your work. Take away from us the spirit of bondage and slavery, that we can truly rejoice in you as we serve your church.

God of healing,

By his patience in suffering Jesus hallowed earthly pain and gave us the example of obedience to your will. Be near those who are waiting for healing in their time of weakness and pain; sustain them by your grace, that their strength and courage may not fail; heal them according to your will;

We bring to you those we know:

— *mention other names* —

and all those we do not know.

Open our eyes and give us wisdom to see where we can bring your healing and hope in our relationships, neighbourhoods and communities as your hopeful and compassionate people.

God of a thousand faces,

We rejoice in You, GOD, in whose image we are brothers and sisters. and by whose example in Jesus Christ we know the breadth and depth of Your universal love. Grant that as we serve you now on earth, so we may one day rejoice with all the saints in your kingdom of light and peace,

Weave us together as a unique community with the colourful tapestry of our diversity and help us to dwell in true community with you and each other.

Blessing

Ps. Levon Kardashian

Go now, with good news for the abused and prepare the way for the Lord.

Wait patiently.

Believe those who tell you their stories of abuse,
support and encourage one another.

Be strong and do not fear.

And may God come quickly to save you;

May Christ Jesus give you everlasting joy and gladness;

And may the Holy Spirit strengthen your hearts and lead you on God's holy way.

Amen!



Suggested Hymns/Songs

Joy shall come even to the wilderness

Comfort, comfort all my people

O come, o come Emanuel

Prepare the way of the Lord, Prepare the way of the Lord

Christ's is the world in which we move – A touching place

Joy to the World



Week 4

Theme: **Joseph – a righteous man. Courage, Respect.**

Notes for church leaders:

- You may wish to set up a Wreath with four candles and light one on the first week, then two on the second week etc.
- At the lighting of the candle you may wish to use some statistics from these notes to highlight the issues of domestic and family violence.

Scripture

Isaiah 7:10-14 ... *A maiden is with child ... a son ... Emmanuel ... God is with us*

Psalms 23:1-6 ... *Those with clean hands and pure hearts*

Romans 1:1-7 ... *Paul writes to a community he has not founded and claims his authority to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God ...*

Matthew 1:18-24 ... *The annunciation to Joseph – Do not be afraid ...*

Music Suggestions

Prayer of St Francis (Make me a channel of your Peace)

A New Heart for a New World (Trisha Watts)

O Come O Come Emmanuel (Traditional)

Christ be our Light (Bernadette Farrell)

Maranatha Come Lord Jesus

Sermon Notes

As the wonderful celebration of Christmas (Christ born) fast approaches, today's scriptures remind us that we are not alone in our life struggles, that God is with us! God guided Joseph to make a courageous stand against societal norms when he discovers that Mary is pregnant ... *Joseph, being a man of honour, and wanting to spare her publicity, plans to divorce her 'informally' or 'quietly'* ... God's angel tells him not to be afraid ... Joseph's final response to Mary's unconventional situation comes from a heart attuned to God's love and compassion rather than one which follows the dictates of religious and societal rules. Because of Joseph's courage, the Saviour of the world becomes incarnate and dwells amongst us, born into a loving family with a humble but strong and wise mother, and a righteous, caring father as his role models.



Sadly, not all children are born into such loving relationships where they can discover who they are in the sight of God, be guided to make wise choices, learn to stand up for those who cannot make such choices, and love all people no matter their skin colour, race, religion or ethnic group. Jesus gives everyone the chance to be healed and reconciled and to live lives of justice, peace, the courage of one's convictions, and respect for all.

It is important to be aware that some families do not enjoy peaceful and joyful get-togethers at Christmas. For some, extra financial pressures, increased alcohol use, the heat and lack of resources, school holiday issues, and being with family when past hurts have not been dealt with, may lead some people to employ violence and abuse to manage stressful situations. If a relationship already has an undercurrent of power games and an attitude of entitlement, Christmas with its extra pressures and the idealistic expectations of happy family gatherings, can be a particularly volatile time. Some of these people are members of Christian communities, people who terrorise their families in their homes but appear outwardly charming towards others. The abused family members live in fear and shame, often denying the abuser's behaviour and believing that, "If I could just be a better spouse / son / daughter, this would never happen." Often, they will make excuses for the abuser and go to great lengths to convince others that all is well.

As family members, neighbours and friends, today's scripture is a reminder to be alert, to be informed and aware, and to be prepared to offer support and understanding. Statistically across Australia, one person is killed at the hands of an intimate partner – estranged or otherwise – every week. These are the cases that come across our News feeds, airwaves and television screens, but for many more, the suffering happens behind closed doors and in the dark, and while not resulting in death, can still be devastating. The harm to children is incalculable and long term, and the cost to the community is astronomical.

Members of the Joint Churches Commission for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence have initiated this campaign to raise awareness of this largely hidden blight on our families, neighbourhoods and communities. Eliminating domestic violence starts with recognising that it occurs everywhere, even within our own church, and recognising that this season is a particularly dangerous time for such families. We want to make our churches safe places, refuges from domestic and family violence. Please take a brochure if you would like to know how you can support people who may be being abused. If you are struggling with the issues of family abuse, please know that the joy of Christmas is for you, too. Try to find someone here that you trust to talk to, someone who can provide support when you need it.

In the words of Erica Hamence, from Common Grace:

"Brothers and sisters, we have an opportunity. **We have an opportunity to be the kind of family God calls us to be.** But the danger in front of us is that we will resist this call because of its cost. We will need to give up our preference for being comfortable, in favour of being aware. We will need to



give up our assumption that we are right, in favour of being teachable. We will need to give up some of the battle lines we've drawn around conservative and progressive, and redraw them against the injustice and oppression which has been exposed in both of our camps. May God enable it to be so!"

Prayer of the Faithful

Leader: Oh God of mercy and compassion, we long for your coming. Help us to be alert to the needs of others as we pray ...

1. For those who suffer in silence in abusive relationships ... *Gracious God hear us.*
2. For children who witness violence in their homes, that they may find kindness, compassion and support to tell their stories and to experience healing... *Gracious God hear us.*
3. For communities to offer safe places for people dealing with abusive relationships... *Gracious God hear us.*
4. For authorities such as Police, Ambulance workers, Medical staff, Social Workers to receive the support they need to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities... *Gracious God hear us.*
5. For all those who work for peace and non-violence in our society ... *Gracious God hear us.*

Benediction

Gracious God, as we prepare for happy holidays and family celebrations at the birth of your Son, Jesus, please help us to be alert to the needs of others who might be struggling under the weight of shame and secrecy. In your mercy grant us peace and hope to be your light to others. Amen.



Instructions for Making Peace Roses

1. Separate 2 cheap tissues into 4 pieces
2. Layer these on top of each other with points going in different directions
3. Pick up from the middle and flip over
4. Twist tissues underneath into a stem
5. Use a length of twist tie to put round centre to make a stem.
6. Spray with rose water



Domestic Violence Prayer

Response: Bring your healing in Jesus' Name.

God of Compassion, we commend to you all who suffer from domestic and family violence.

We commend to you all who are affected *physically* by being hit, pinched, punched, cut, scratched or assaulted sexually. **R**

We commend to you all who are affected *emotionally* by being put down, sworn at, told they are losers or stupid. **R**

We commend to you all who are affected *socially* by abusers' making relatives and friends unwelcome, or who are so badly behaved that few will visit. **R**

We commend to you all who are affected *sexually* but being subjected to sex on demand or being humiliated publicly by obscene sexual gestures or comments. **R**

We commend to you all who are affected *financially* by having no or little access to money to which they are entitled withheld, embezzled or gambled away. **R**

We commend to you all who are affected *vocationally* by having to work slavishly under the control of a partner or having the way they do things dictated to them. **R**

We commend to you all who are affected *spiritually* by having scripture quoted against them, as they override victims' feelings and opinions, without regard for what will result to the other person's spiritual wellbeing. S/he is left bearing a weight of guilt, judgement or condemnation, as well as confusion about their worth and standing as a Christian. **R**

We commend to you all perpetrators of domestic violence, that police take victims' stories seriously, that magistrates take each case seriously and disinterestedly, that Domestic Violence Orders be imposed more often and longer with dire consequences for those who breach them; we pray for the perpetrators who lack self-control, have psychological problems or are enslaved by alcohol, drugs or narcissism. **R**



We pray, Lord, that households and workplaces will be safer, as infrastructures and laws improve resources for victims of domestic violence and for perpetrators. May your Spirit sweep through this land, cleansing it from domestic violence sin and enabling victims to begin to recover and to start anew. Bless and protect children and parents caught up in domestic and family violence. We thank you, praise you and bless you, Lord. In Jesus' mighty Name. **Amen.**

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