



The Congregation of Mark the Evangelist
December 10 2023
Advent 2B

Preparing for Worship Today

- Welcome to this service of worship at Mark the Evangelist!
- Congregational responses are printed in ***bold italics***.
- If you get here early enough, **please read through the text of today's readings prior to our hearing them.** The text can be found at the end of the order of service. We will have brief conversation/response time to the readings after hearing them, and before the sermon – all to make our hearing a little sharper!
- Pray for those who will be leading us in our worship today!



A SERVICE OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

Prelude J Pachelbel, *Warum betrübst du dich*

The Gathering of the People of God

Sung Processional

This round can be sung in numerous parts; feel free to join in wherever you like!

Part 1

Part 2

All cre - a - tion un - der hea - ven, lift your heart, lift your voice!

Part 3

Part 4

God comes bring - ing health and whole-ness; lift your heart, lift your voice!

Listen for repetition of this bar to finish

***All creation under heaven,
lift your heart, lift your voice!
God come bringing health and wholeness,
lift your hear, lift your voice! (repeat...)***

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Affirmation of faith: God is with us

***We are not alone,
we live in God's world.***

***We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.***

We trust in God.

***We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.***

***In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.***

*The United Church of Canada,
General Council 1968, alt. 1998*

Prayers of the People

(Names for inclusion in the prayers may be recorded in the book in the narthex)

The Visible Word: Eucharist

Hymn 506 Author of love divine

(If you are able, please remain standing until after the Lord's Prayer)

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

(The prayer continues...)



***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory,
hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna in the highest!***

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer

***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 for ever. Amen.***

(The people sit)

The Breaking of the Bread

...Let us receive what we are,
let us become what we receive
The body of Christ

The Communion

The Uniting Church recognises this Table as the Lord's and, so, open to all who would normally commune in their home congregations.

GATHERING: *We'll gather in a circle around the table for the distribution of the elements; please wait until all have received and the prayer is said before returning to your seats.*

If you can't stand or walk to the front but would like to receive communion, please raise your hand if the celebrant has not already noticed you.

Offering

Many members now make their offering by electronic transfer; the plate will be passed for those who prefer to make cash/envelope offerings. The prayer dedicating the offerings 'captures' the full range of gifts.

Notices

The Sending Forth of the People of God

Hymn 578 How firm a foundation

Word of Mission and Blessing

Postlude J Speth, *Toccata Tertia*

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We'd love to hear your feedback on the service.

Our email address is:

enquiries@marktheevangelist.unitingchurch.org.au

Our website is:

<http://marktheevangelist.unitingchurch.org.au/>

TODAY'S READINGS

Read the following texts-for-the-day before the service and be ready for a brief conversation about them before we hear them read!

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

What does "served her term" mean?

Whose voice is this?

³A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every

mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

What might it mean for us that "all people are grass?"

What is this "word"?

⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Who is (and is not) this flock?

PEOPLE TO COMMEMORATE

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), person of prayer



The life and writings of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton mark him as one of the great prophetic spiritual writers and teachers of the twentieth century. Merton integrated his life and writing by embracing wholeheartedly contradiction and paradox while expressing his passionate beliefs as a Christian through the voice of the mystic and poet. The greatness of Merton's legacy lies largely in his capacity to record with searing transparency both his personal spiritual journey and his observations on

the spiritual, political, economic, social and environmental issues of his day.

He was above all open to experience and not afraid of it: "Suspended entirely from God's mercy, I am content for anything to happen" (Journal, November 29, 1952).

Merton was born on 31 January 1915 in Prades, France. Perhaps, classically, his was an unhappy childhood. Merton's mother died when he was six. His father was an artist who, having moved around constantly, often leaving his son alone, died when Merton was fifteen. For several years Merton lived freely following his desires but also accompanied by personal angst and intense searching. In his mid-twenties, as a student at Columbia University, he experienced a religious conversion and joined the Catholic Church. In 1941 he entered the Trappist Monastery at Gethsemane in Kentucky and spent the rest of his life as a member of that community.

His tragic and premature death from an accidental electrocution on 10 December 1968, while at an international conference of monks in Bangkok, was noted with a front-page obituary in *The New York Times*. He was 58 years old.

A man who loved silence yet felt compelled to write about silence. A man who craved solitude yet chose to disclose himself to the world and become fully engaged with it in order to discover more about God for himself and for others. A man who shunned public acclaim yet was read and admired by millions. What is the key to this great spiritual teacher? The key is in the remarkable gift of his writing and what it communicates to us. Writing was literally Merton's life. "To write is to think and to live—even to pray" (Journal, September, 1958).

[contd ...]

PEOPLE TO COMMEMORATE

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), person of prayer [... contd]

Merton's first memoir, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, the story of his journey from self-absorbed youth to novice monk, became a best-seller and has remained in print since 1948. Merton's personal journals run to seven volumes. He writes in many different genres: devotional and philosophical meditations (e.g. *New Seeds of Contemplation* and *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*); social criticism and commentary (e.g. *The Seeds of Destruction*); explorations in Eastern spirituality (e.g. *Zen and The Birds of Appetite*); biblical studies (e.g. *Bread in the Wilderness*); and wrote several collections of poetry and essays.

Merton is always evocative and his insights illuminating on the nature of being human and on our ability to perceive God at work in our selves, each other and the world. And so he wrote:

I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me now that I realise what we all are. If only everybody could realise this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people they are all walking around shining like the sun.

Merton was profoundly interested in the East and especially in how the ways Eastern thought, particularly Buddhism, might illuminate aspects of the Western tradition:

If I can unite in myself, in my own spiritual life, the thought of the East and the West, of the Greek and Latin fathers, I will create in myself a reunion of the divided Church, and from that unity in myself can come the exterior and visible unity of the Church. For, if we want to bring together East and West, we cannot do it by imposing one upon the other. We must contain both in ourselves and transcend them both in Christ (28 April 1957).

Merton was a radical inclusivist and thoroughly post-modern. Yet ultimately, his is the voice of the mystic and poet: "By the reading of Scripture I am so renewed that all nature seems renewed round me and with me. The sky seems to be more pure, a cooler blue, the trees a deeper green, light is sharper on the outlines of the forests and the hills, and the whole world is charged with the glory of God and I feel fire and music in the earth under my feet." (8 August 1949)

(Quotations from Merton are from *The Intimate Merton, His Life from His Journals*. Edited by Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo. Lion Publishing: Oxford, 1999.)

Contributed by Carolyn Craig-Emilsen

The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle

www.oikoumene.org/resources/prayer-cycle

Cambodia

During the sixth century, people known as the Khmers established an empire that lasted for several centuries. During the colonial period the area was ruled by the French. Cambodia obtained its independence in 1953, though was heavily affected by the war in neighbouring Vietnam and by a communist insurgency movement known as the Khmer Rouge, who captured the capital in 1975. Due to this, 75 percent of all teaching staff and 96 percent of university students were killed. It is estimated that at least 3 million people died during the four years of the regime. The Khmer Rouge attempted to eradicate all religion: some 90 percent of Buddhist monks and nuns perished and an unknown number of Christians were killed. The Khmer Rouge declined rapidly in the mid-1990s and a coalition government was formed after national elections in 1998, which brought renewed political stability. Christianity came to Cambodia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Several Independent churches were established during the twentieth century, and the New Apostolic Church is currently the largest Christian denomination in Cambodia. There are no WCC member churches based in this country.

Laos

Laos is entirely landlocked on the southern Asia peninsula. Myanmar and China lie to the north, with Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south and Thailand to the west.

Laos was first united under one government in the fourteenth century. In 1713 internal conflict led to the division of the country into three kingdoms, leaving the country vulnerable to aggression. After a long struggle to maintain independence, Laos became a French colony in 1893. Attempts were made to regain independence following the formation of the Communist Party of Indochina. This party led groups in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam in their struggles for self-determination. Laos became a constitutional monarchy in 1947, and in 1949 it was granted limited self-government within the French Union. Lao independence was recognized by the Geneva Agreement on Indochina in 1954. Despite this agreement the Laotian government remained unstable for years.

Laos is one of the least developed countries in southeast Asia. Currently, there are no railroads and just over 2'000km of paved highways. This lack of infrastructure makes disaster relief difficult, particularly as flooding is common.

Christianity in Laos began with Italian Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century. All the major Catholic mission centres are located on the border with Thailand. Beginning in 1950, the Catholic mission shifted its focus to mountain peoples. The first Protestant missionaries - Swiss Brethren who translated the Bible into the vernacular - arrived in 1902. Overseas Missionary Fellowship workers strengthened their work after 1957. Of the Protestant groups, the most successful is the Gospel Church of Laos. During the 1970s the communist government took over all Catholic schools, orphanages, residences and churches, and eliminated religious education. All foreign missionaries were forced to leave. Though the current law allows freedom of religion, the government controls all public meetings and requires that they be registered.

Second Sunday of Advent



Martha Tadesso/Act for Peace

Bringing Peace to refugees in Ethiopia

Sara* fled to Ethiopia from Yemen eight years ago with her four children. In Addis Ababa refugees are at risk of severe exploitation, with little access to education, medical care, or basics like food. Through Act for Peace's partner, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission, you can help provide refugees with medical and psychological care, as well as livelihoods training, giving people like Sara the chance to build secure futures for their families. **Please give today.**

*Name changed for safety reasons

CALL: 1800 025 101

VISIT: christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au

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

People to commemorate this week

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), person of prayer

Ecumenical Prayer Cycle

Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam

LECTIONARY READINGS 17 DECEMBER 2023

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8,19-28

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As a Parish Mission of the Uniting Church in Australia,

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