

ONLINE SERVICE

during COVID-19

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29 November 2020

Welcome and Notices

Amanda Fairs
viola

Sunday of Christ the King
Call to Worship

Prayer of Invocation

Young at Heart
Skateboard School in Kabul
Christine Bradbeer

Bible Reading: Matthew 1:18–25
Ken Margo

What do you expect?
Isaiah 7:14

Prayers of Intercession
and
The Lord's Prayer



NOTICES

29 November 2020

Wednesday 2 December 1.30 pm Sweet Hour of Prayer
Sunday 6 December 11 am Advent #2

For your prayers this week:

Congregational member: Shirley CHAN



and

Andrew ADAMS in Japan witnessing to University students on campus and at camps.

Members who wish to continue their freewill offerings during the COVID 19 restrictions may post to our Treasurer. Vic Ansell, 59 Queen St Kangaroo Flat, Vic 3555 or use the electronic banking details below.



Electronic Banking Details: ANZ Forest Hill,
Account name: Blackburn Presbyterian Church
BSB: 013-328. Account number: 2970 40694

BLACKBURN
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Session Clerk: Mr Keith Ferres 98305466
Treasurer: Mr Vic Ansell 5447 7118



EXPECTANCY

29 November 2020
Advent 1



WELCOME



The year saw a surge in the number of prisoners of conscience. A crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly continued. A new cybersecurity law entered into force in January, aimed at restricting human rights online. The authorities subjected human rights defenders and activists to harassment, intimidation, and abusive restrictions both online and offline. The government prosecuted human rights defenders and activists, using a range of criminal law provisions. Prolonged pre-trial detention was common. Prisoners of conscience were denied access to lawyers and family members, lacked proper health care, and in some cases were subjected to torture.

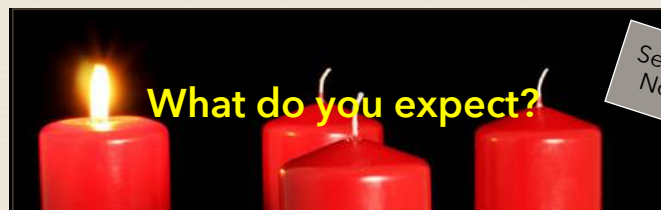
Amnesty International 2019

In Communist Vietnam, Christians are accused of betraying their identity and culture. Christianity is viewed as a foreign religion with no official place in the country. Violence and discrimination have forced some believers to flee to neighbouring countries.

Communists regard the church in Vietnam as a dangerous group capable of mobilising masses of people, and a threat to their ideology. New believers have their rights stripped away from them and are often forced to flee their homes to escape violence. Some children from ethnic minorities are not allowed to attend school because of their new faith, others are unable to receive sufficient medical attention because of their faith.

Churches and Christian property are demolished and attacked, and Christian leaders and activists are often arrested and imprisoned. Importing Bibles is restricted and tightened regulations on online communication have limited Christian space further.

Open Doors, Australia, 2020



Christmas is coming once again. Christmas in a pandemic! What are you hoping for? What expectations do you have?

When it comes to our place before God the Bible has a lot to say. In it God speaks to both individuals and to nations.

We do not progress in the Christian life by becoming more competent, more knowledgeable, more virtuous, or more energetic. We do not advance in the Christian life by acquiring expertise. Each day, and many times a day, we return to Square One: God Said. ... We adore and we listen." Eugene Peterson.

1 Square#1 Guilty? We are guilty. The Bible makes no bones about this.

From the beginning of the first book in the collection (Genesis chapter 3) it is clear that the human family did wrong.

There are multiple words used to describe the wrong, each slightly differently nuanced. We sin - that is we have fallen short of the target. We trespass - we have crossed the line of demarcation. We have committed iniquity - we are crooked when we should have been straight.

This is all bad. It is bad because it spoils the perfection and pollutes the beauty of God's creation. The early stories in Genesis give a picture of damaged relationships at every imaginable level.

God has withdrawn, people are at odds with each other, and even within themselves, and the created environment suffers. This is the worst thing that has happened to everybody.

Our domestic grief and violence easily escalates. We live in a world undone.

2 Wait! Former Chief Rabbi of the UK and British Commonwealth, Lord Jonathan Sacks, who died this month, traced his faith to Abraham. Yes, Abraham. In that first book of the Bible God came to a person and said "I will be your God", and the God of your descendants. It was like, "just trust me and do what I say".

This amazing relationship gave rise to the Bible.

The great characters of the Bible stand in the same succession: Moses, Deborah, Joshua, Ruth, David... Joseph and Mary. The line is in Matthew 1, their faith is underscored in Hebrews 11. So what happened to their guilt!?

God wanted it removed. The plan was that it should be atoned for and erased. This was true at a personal level. See for eg., David's contrition in Psalm 51. But it was also true at a corporate level with the institution of an atoning sacrifice, especially the annual *Yom Kippur* - Day of Atonement.

There were consequences for denial of guilt, as the prophets made very clear. But repeatedly the invitation is made to trust that *God is with them* (Isaiah 7 *Immanuel*) and will make his home among them (Ezekiel 43:1-12).

The strands of prophecy in which the purposes of God are expressed slowly came together. There was a lot of wait time!

3 Adore . These all "died in faith" says the writer of Hebrews (11:13). The fulfilment was still future and more awesome than they could have imagined. It began with the world in view (Genesis 12:3). But how real was this expectation?

Very real! As real as pregnancy and birth. *When the time had fully come God sent his Son, born of a woman* (Galatians 4:4). A time of strong feelings and deep emotions.

The first book of our New Testament tells us of the hostility of a Jewish king and the adoration of the Magi (Matthew 2). Words fail us. God IS with us. Adoration is to drink it in.

4 Listen Listen to what he says. Note how he lives. Wait for his words. Worship at his feet. Worship?

"Worship" says Eugene Peterson, "is the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God. It doesn't satisfy our hunger, it whets our appetite"

As we take His message into our lives it "gets metabolised into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Father, feet washed in company with the Son." (EP)

God means to do something with us, and he means to do it in community. We are in on what God is doing, and we are in on it