

Together We Pray

SUNDAY 24 December 2023, Advent 4 – Christmas Eve

Readings: 2 Sam 7:1-11, 16; [for Ps: Luke 1:47-55, The Magnificat]; Rom 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Let us pray for the church and for the world, giving thanks for God's grace and goodness.

Son of God, light in the darkness, child of joy and peace, you come to mend our troubled world; to 'straighten the winding ways of our hearts and smooth the paths made rough by sin.'^{*} We pray for peace over the holy city of Bethlehem -- the longed-for peace the world can never give [nzpb]. With open hearts, we pray for peace to reign over violence: in Ukraine, Russia, Gaza, Israel; Syria, Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, and many other places in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. We pray for those injured and needing rescue, and all coming to help and heal them. We pray for the shelter and safety of innocents.

Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

Let us remember our cities, this diocese and its beautiful towns, farms, animals, mountains, and streams. We pray for our bishop, +Justin, and all who offer their gifts this season. May all who come inside our parishes find welcome with us; and may the hungry and lost be drawn to our love and gentleness. Love comes down at Christmas and is born in us anew. May our hearts stretch wider. Holy God, let us bring your light, your life to others – and remind us Christ's love doesn't live only here but in unexpected places and unlikely people, unbroken and true.

Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

God of surprises, your angel Gabriel surprised a young woman and threw her whole world into doubt and uncertainty. And yet, Mary said yes to God. Be close to all whose routine faith is interrupted, especially by disaster or misfortune, violence or sudden uncertainty, or perhaps by something greater than they'd known. Help us become discerning and wise, protecting our children, showering them with love, meeting their needs, teaching them what we can. It is hard, with all our work and worry, to be parents. We pray mothers and fathers will be supported, and strong to guide their children, and that our elders find joy in little ones around them. May our lives and our stories find deeper meaning in the sacred story, retold every year, of God coming to be with us. We pray for families, friends, and every person who has no one they can truly call a friend.^{**} But because you are here, God, and we are here, may our love in this fallen down world begin to heal it, one kind gesture, one smile, one piece of bread and blessed cup at a time.

Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

*Sources: NRSV Bible; NZ Prayer Book; *A Prayer Book for Australia; John Pritchard, Intercessions Handbook;*

***Samuel Wells, Crafting Prayers for Public Worship; NEB Starr, prayers.*