



Bathurst Uniting Church

Sharing God's love by connecting people to God;
people to people; and people to community.

Newsletter

December 2023



We are in the season of Advent. A season that is very much about preparation. We prepare for Christmas. Literally, the word Advent means coming or arrival. We could say the coming or arrival of Christmas. More accurately, the coming or arrival

of Jesus Christ. Jesus has come, and Jesus will come again.

As children, Christmas is mostly wonderful. Full of mystery, delight, happiness. For some no matter how good they are, and how much they imagine and anticipate, they will never get the best presents because of family circumstances.

As we get older some of that shine of Christmas can be tarnished. A tragic happening. The first Christmas after a life-changing event, and the loss of a loved one. We can grow cynical as we grow older. Life is not easy. Stuff happens. Some of that stuff is through our own ignorance, arrogance, or just misadventure. Some things happen to us. The gloss or shine of life can wear off, or maybe we never had that due to the environment in which we grew up. Some people speak of hating Christmas.

Well, we can't pretend everything is ok when it isn't, but perhaps we can have a new appreciation of Christmas that involves hope, peace, joy, hope, love, and faith?

On Christmas Day in 2018, our former church in Parramatta held a Christmas Day lunch. At one point, Julie and I sat with a woman in her forties who was having her first Christmas Day with her daughter. And her daughter was having her first Christmas day with her daughter. Three generations together on Christmas Day, for the first time. Wonderful. We also sat with people who otherwise were going to be home alone. There was happiness, and we were delighted to be part of that event.

With the new Church year, we have a new set of Bible readings for the next 12 months. The Gospel is that of Mark. Mark does not have birth narrative of Jesus. Mark begins with these words,
The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Into uncertain times, Mark offers good news. Faith.

Mark's gospel was written in about CE 66-70. Nero set fire to Rome, and blamed the Christians. Peter and Paul were martyred. The Romans are about to descend on Jerusalem and partially destroy it. The Christians, who have been a sect of the Jews, are under threat. There will be a severing of that relationship. When darkness is all around, and fear abounds, Mark writes his gospel.

In Mark faith is not the opposite of doubt. Faith is not the opposite of unbelief. In Mark, faith is the opposite of fear. To a church that is under threat of being wiped out, Mark's Jesus says 'fear not.'

In Mark there is this wonderful story of Jesus in the boat. The seas are big. The disciples, seasoned fishers, are worried. Fearful. They fear that all will be lost. The stormy billows are rising. Jesus, on the other hand is asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. The disciples awaken Jesus. Jesus calms the storm. And then the disciples say, "who is this man who even the wavs and the wind obey?"

The story is so influential, that churches built their ceilings to look like the keel of ships, so when the people look up, they will see the timberwork, and remember. Remember the story. Remember Jesus calming the storm. Remember with Jesus he overcomes our fears.

Chapter 8 is the hinge point in Mark's Gospel. There are two questions of Jesus. "Who do they say that I am? Who do you say that I am?"

To the first question, the disciples report that others say that Jesus is a great teacher, maybe a prophet. Someone who can heal people. Jesus says, "but you, who do you say that I am?" To the second question Peter answered, "you are the Christ."

The first answer is close, but not there. It is like wanting to go to Central in Sydney and getting off the station before, at Redfern. Close, but not central.

Getting off the train at Redfern instead of Central is like settling for a second-best Christmas.

The other week I was down in Melbourne for a conference. I left home in Llanarth, drove to Orange and flew from Orange via Sydney. One flight to Sydney, change planes, then a flight to Melbourne, then tram and bus. Quite a trek.

Coming home, I shared a cab to the airport, then caught the plane to Sydney, and got off the plane, ready to catch my flight to Orange, so I could then drive to our home at Llanarth.

Except it didn't work that way. I got to Sydney Ok. But my flight to Orange was changed. The airline put me up in a hotel, at a place called Wolli Creek. It was not what I wanted, and not where I wanted to be.

Saturday morning, a new flight, that was then delayed, and delayed. Then we got on the bus to go to the plane. There on the bus, next to the plane, we waited. And waited. And waited. Then that flight was cancelled. We had to go back into the terminal. New arrangements were made for a later flight. I spent much of Saturday at Sydney Airport. Sydney airport is not a bad place, but not where I wanted to be.

Imagine settling for staying at Sydney airport when you wanted to go to home? Imagine staying at Sydney airport all your life, when you could be home.

But that is what we often do with the Christian faith. We settle for something less. It is like we camp at Sydney Airport all our lives, when we could be at our destination, we could be home.

Jesus says, "but you, who do you say that I am." Peter says, "you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Things are changed when we daily put our trust in Jesus. He is the one who died and rose from the dead. The one who overcame the biggest fears in life and in death that anyone might face. This Jesus brings faith. This Jesus brings joy. This Jesus changes Christmas.

We can focus on the wrong things and get to Christmas Day, anxious, angry and resentful. We can focus on all the things except the main thing. We can stop short of getting to Christmas with joy and faith ready to celebrate the good news of Jesus Christ for every day.

Don't stay half-way. As John Wesley said, "don't stop as an almost Christian." Go the whole way to the destination. Then there is joy even in the midst of the stuff of life. Then there is joy, even when stuck at Sydney Airport for a day. It didn't stop us. While I was sitting in the departure lounge at Sydney airport, and Julie at home in Llanarth, we had our usual morning prayers, though over the phone.

Jesus asks the question: "who do you say that I am?"

We answer that question every day of the week. Our answer can be 'you Jesus, are the one in whom I trust for my hope, my joy, my life, even in the midst of the stuff of life.' With such an answer, such a faith, we will indeed have Christmas joy every day.

Blessings

Keith Hamilton (based upon the sermon preached at White Rock Carols, 26 November 2023)

Advent and Christmas

(as listed in the brochure that was sent earlier)

Sunday 10 December 9.30am KUCA presentation

5.00pm Contemporary service in Activities Hall

7.00pm – 9.00pm - *Carols by Candlelight near the Adventure Playground*

Sunday 17 December 9.30am Rev Keith Hamilton, preacher John.

5.00pm Contemporary service in Activities Hall

3.00pm – 4.30pm “Blue Christmas” in the Church foyer.

Remember a loved one, prayer, chat and afternoon tea

Thursday 21 December 6.00pm – 7.00pm - *Carols in Kings Parade*

Christmas Eve 24 December 9.30am Worship Rev Keith Hamilton

5.30pm Worship in the Church Courtyard



Christmas Day

25 December

9.30am – Worship Rev Keith Hamilton

Sunday 31 December 9.30am Rev Keith Hamilton

Worship in January will be each Sunday at 9.30am

The 5pm worship will be in recess after 24 December and will restart on Sunday 28 January.

You can join morning worship on Zoom by going to <http://www.bathurstunitingchurch.com.au/> and pressing the purple button.

There will be a
CONGREGATIONAL MEETING this
Sunday (3 December) after morning
worship. It is to hear an update on
the budget and will be followed by a
bring and share lunch.

Mowing Roster

9 December Ian & Allan

30 December Aisea

13 January David

27 January Brian

Church Council Election

An election will be held on 25 February 2024 for four positions on Church Council.

Nominations close on 4 February.

There are information sheets with a nomination form attached to the email that comes with this newsletter or the sheets will be available at church from this Sunday.

BUSS UPDATE



On Wednesday this week some of our volunteers worked a shift to pack the hampers organized by Hope Care and funded by various churches including BUSS.



Thank
You

To all those who helped and to those who have donated money to enable BUSS to put together extra hampers to fill all the requests for help that we have received!

The café will finish the year with a barbecue on Sunday 17 December at 12 at the back of the church. Music BUSS will be playing at the barbecue. All are welcome to come along. The café will reopen on 13 January, 2024.



Staying Connected

For pastoral support, please contact your Pastoral Partner, or one of the Elders, or email BUConnect@gmail.com and we'll put you in touch with someone.

You can also contact our minister, Rev Keith Hamilton on 0417487446 or email keith.hamilton.bathurstuc@gmail.com

PLEASE NOTE

There will be no January newsletter. The next newsletter will be for Sunday 4 February 2024.

As always, urgent matters will be emailed as needed. If you have something urgent please contact me. Ruth

The newsletter email address is bathurstucanews@gmail.com. Please send items by 9pm on the last Wednesday of the month

Please send news or information for the website to allanwray@hotmail.com