



ADVENT THREE

JOY



CALL TO WORSHIP

We move from vaguely welcoming the season
to definite plans, lists and deadlines,
the pace accelerates ...
concerts celebrate the season ...
break ups mark end of year.

***We carve out this space in which to be thoughtful,
reflective to contemplate the meaning of it all
and ponder these things in our hearts.***



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OPENING RESPONSES

In our land the sun shines brightly on our 'journey to Bethlehem'

The days are long and filled with light

Let us find the joy inherent in this journeying

Let us enjoy and rejoice!



LIGHTING THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE: HOPE

Read Partner Story from South Sudan: For Zero Hunger

Until last year, Joyce ran a tiny stall at a local market. She would buy a bucket each of sorghum and peanuts to sell one cup at a time. Once she sold one bucket, she would buy another. The small profit she made for a day's labour kept her three children healthy. Her husband and father were killed in 2015 when their homes were attacked, part of South Sudan's bitter war. For her Maridi Service Agency has been a lifeline. She attended a small business course last year and received money to invest. Her business has grown and she has food stored to use later when prices are higher. It is enough to pay school fees, medical expenses and live comfortably. **Be the Lifeline to families in need of food.**

Lighting the Advent Candle of Joy

For those who have no joy in their hearts,
For those whose lives are full of difficulty,
For those who are anxious and have no peace,
We light the candle of joy.

We remember also the voice of God's messengers calling us to be bearers of joy in a troubled world.

Light the candle.

You, Lord Jesus, are our joy, bring joy to the world.

May this light signal a breakthrough, a brighter future,

A new order and a better way.

THE READINGS

Zephaniah 3:14-20: In the midst of the corruption and injustice he found in Judah, Zephaniah holds the promise of renewal. He condemns all religious and political leaders (v. 3-4), appealing to the remnant of people to do what is right and speak what is true (v. 13). Anticipating a time of justice and truth, he pens these words of joy.

Isaiah 12:2-6: The return home and the chance to restore what was lost in conflict are compelling narratives for displaced peoples. Isaiah exhorts the exiles or remnant (v. 12, 16) to find their salvation in God. In their suffering and displacement, this dream is a source of joy and celebration.

Philippians 4: 4-7: In verse 5, we find the text that provides the Biblical centre for this Christmas Appeal. Paul urges the Philippians to be gentle with one another, not insisting on their own way but willing to yield and accommodate others. God the source of peace is with us.

Luke 3: 7-18: At a time when people felt were poor and mistreated, John's message was captivating. In the limited economy of the time, if someone had more, it meant that the extra food or cloak had been taken from someone else. The peasants of his day knew who was greedy and who had their fair share. Impressed by this message, that crowds ask John what they should do (v.10). He talks to them straight – if they have two cloaks and extra food must give them away. Tax collectors and soldiers were told to do their job –do not overcharge, accept bribes or demand payment. In v. 17 he points to the day of reckoning.

SERMON NOTES

On the third Sunday of Advent, we look for the joy that can come even when suffering and violence are acute. Joy persists even in places of great suffering and is often a mechanism for a community to share solidarity. Rather than block out the hunger and inequity, Luke would have us do something about it. A donation to the Christmas Appeal is one way to show our concern and solidarity for those who are hungry and in need of shelter.

We have chosen Philippians 4:5 as the key verse for this Appeal as a way to challenge the current way of doing business. It puts the focus on how we relate to each other but could equally well be about politics or business relations. Taking our attention from what 'I' must do, to how we treat each other is a way to add value to our world. The planet is home to us all – this Christmas let us build lifelines rather than hatelines.

Listening to stories from other places, serves to remind us of the interconnectedness of life and as a call to action.

- What can we share with others? What do they offer us?
- Where do we find joy this Christmas?
- How can we be part of the campaign to end hunger everywhere?

PARTNER STORY: BE THE LIFELINE TO DISASTER SURVIVORS

Every morning Joyce goes down to the market. Like any salesperson, she knows the importance of loyal customers to her business. Each day she has a regular clientele of women like her coming to buy food in small quantities – a cup of groundnuts, some beans, or an onion. Like her, they have been displaced because of South Sudan’s bitter conflict.

Three years ago, Joyce watched an unknown gunman kill her father and husband James on the same day. She was left traumatised and responsible for their three children. The youngest was still being breastfed.

“That was the end of life for me and my children, I almost ran mad”, she said. “Since then I have struggled to feed and raise school fees for my children.”

For two years, she would buy a basin of food at a time. With the proceeds from her stall, she had enough to buy another basinful. When the day ended, she could feed her family a little – but it was never enough.

Last year she took part in a livelihood project for single mothers run by CWS partner, Maridi Service Agency. She attended a one-week intensive course on running a small business and received a small amount of start-up capital.

“After receiving the money, I bought the items in big quantities - two sacks of groundnuts (peanuts) and 5 basins of *simsim* (sesame seeds). I bought enough to store. I plan to sell it during the time of scarcity so as to get more profit,” said Joyce.

Her market stall has doubled in size. She has a table on which to display her wares. Now able to feed her family, she can pay school fees and medical expenses.

Five years of civil war have almost stripped the world’s newest country of hope. Already one of the poorest, the situation for its people worsened as conflict between political leaders spread quickly. Many now live on the edge of hunger – 6.1 million people – more than half the population. Guns can be easier to find than food. 1.84 million people have been forced from their homes often from violent attacks or because their homes and crops have been burnt from the ground. The people have proved resilient and courageous through everything, South



Joyce at her stall before attending small business training run by MSA.

Sudan's churches have pressed for peace and unity at every level. A tentative peace process is in place, but conflict can break out at any time.

South Sudanese have had little opportunity to attend school. Poverty and decades of conflict have left many in danger of being left behind.

Be the Lifeline to communities facing the worst effects of climate change.

MARIDI SERVICE AGENCY

Founded in 2000 by students returning from studies in Uganda, the Maridi Service Agency has worked hard to improve the lives of their town and district. Through all of South Sudan's troubles they have focused on giving young people opportunities through education, protection and empowerment.

Maridi (population around 100,000) is in the state of Western Equatoria, traditionally more peaceful than much of the rest of the country.

MSA operates the only HIV and AIDS clinic in Maridi offering free testing and counselling. Those infected are referred to the hospital for treatment. MaridiFM ran awareness programmes on HIV and AIDS and child protection. They took HIV and AIDS education into the schools.

MSA manages two preschools and the Maridi High School with a special focus on education for girls. They offer 20 scholarships to female students attending High School which include the requirement that they not become pregnant..

Funding from our South Sudan Appeal matched by the New Zealand government is supporting displaced mothers with training and capital to start-up small businesses like food or tea stalls, and to plant gardens.

MSA operates the only local radio station, Maridi FM. The station is a primary platform for education in the community. Last year they ran a series of programmes on HIV/AIDS, access to education, early and forced marriages, hygiene and sanitation, child care and protection, health, youth issues and for women.

SDG 2: ZERO HUNGER

The 2018 Appeal puts the spotlight on our responsibilities to each other and the planet our home. In 2015, the United Nations agreed to a new agenda for sustainable development made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals.



Goal 2 is a commitment to [end hunger](#), achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. For the third year in a row the number of hungry people has increased. In 2017, 821 million people did not get enough to eat. The majority of them live in developing countries. One in four of the world's children [suffer](#) from stunted growth. 66 million children go to school hungry.

To meet the needs of the existing population and the projected 2 billion increase by 2050 will require changes in policy and practice, especially when so much of the world's environment is downgraded. Climate change and water shortages are already putting pressure on farmers. Taken as a whole the global food system has given priority to the largest transnational corporations who control increasing amounts of its resources and international trade. New policies that recognise the importance of the 500 million small farms that provide up to 80% of the food consumed in the developing world offer opportunities to meet this goal.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) conflict is a [key driver](#) of food insecurity, pushing countries like South Sudan to famine and many others close to it. Last year 37 countries required external food assistance.

Many CWS partners include training and support for people to make the most from their small pieces of land. Using local experts, they train farmers to cut costs by using eco-agricultural/restorative/conservation farming techniques. Saving seeds, making compost and sprays, and simple irrigation systems are the first stages. Your donations fund seeds, plants, agricultural trainers and the programmes they run. In Sri Lanka, Monlar has successfully advocated for support for small farmers developing sustainable practices in government programmes.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

***We affirm the prophets
men like John the Baptist, women like Anna
who spoke out against injustice and greed,
calling the nation on its hypocrisy;
foretelling a better future.***

***We affirm the word of prophets like Zephaniah,
the words attributed to Mary in the Gospels,
stubbornly believing deliverance would come
that people now bound would be freed,
outcasts would be brought in
and those on the margin would become the centre.***

***In the light of their courage we look within for strength
to be prophets in our own time;
speaking out about trade
which doesn't seem as fair as its title,***

*homes as scarce as ever,
poverty which does not seem to be
becoming history any time soon,
abuse and violence as rampant as ever,
diseases of our easy civilized lives
which cripple bodies and minds.
abuse of our planet
leaving future generations in debt.*

*We affirm that we need help
from beyond ourselves
from amongst us and from within*

PRAYERS FOR OUR PARTNERS

God, our provider, we know the enjoyment and laughter
That can come over the sharing of a meal.
But there are households all around the world
living from day to day with nothing in reserve,
there are people who struggle to put food on the table,
there are children suffering from malnutrition.

Some have plenty and others have so little,
Yet it doesn't take a lot to lift a family from extreme poverty
To the point of being able to fend for themselves
and put a little aside for education, for medicine, for a rainy day.

We pray for the people of South Sudan,
For families where war has taken away a husband, a father, a son.
We pray for courage and strength for women raising their family on their own,
For grandparents raising their grandchildren.
We thank you for the work of Maridi Service Agency,
May what they do put a smile on the faces of those
whom they help to get back up on their feet.

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This is our prayer in the name of Jesus – the Bread of Life.

SENDING FORTH

We travel together
towards the new birth, towards the new start
We follow the signs which show us the way

To do what is right

To seek justice

To walk humbly with God.

We go in peace. Amen.

NOTES

Special thanks to Rev Dr Susan Jones for the opening liturgies, and Rev Clare Lind and the people of Tawa Union for the candelighting, prayers for partners, and the Hope banner. Under the leadership of Roy Bridge who has a background in emergency management and response, the people created the banner. The backdrop of maps is the primary symbol showing water sources, potential land for cultivation. The secondary symbol for disaster response as used by relief agencies to determine where to focus their efforts. The Life ring O links with lifeline (rope) connects the series.

Join the Lifeline so all people have food, water, dignity and lives free of violence. Leave no one behind. Support the [Christmas Appeal](#).

