

GIVE CLIMATE HOPE THIS CHRISTMAS

**Advent 2 worship and
teaching resources**



**“I have faith, with God’s guidance, we will
find the right alternative in action to our
resilient needs.” Mrs Mafi**

Christian World Service 2024

ADVENT 2: CLIMATE PEACE AS EARTH MOVES

The suggested lectionary Gospel reading for Advent 2 is Luke 3:1-6. The service and sermon ideas below provide ways to think about the actions of moving earth and seeing salvation.

The Climate candle lighting suggests adding to the koru spiral, which began in Advent 1. For all ages, there is a chance to compare the rain readings from your local "home made" rain gauge (the suggested activity from Advent 1) with rain readings in Oceania. A Climate collect and Climate prayers for the earth and all things make several suggestions regarding petition and intercession. Singing the "Pasefika" hymn provides a way of singing together with our neighbours in Oceania.

A thoughtful reading of Luke 3:1-6 in the context of climate change raises questions about how God's relationship to the earth is portrayed in Scripture. These are introduced below and provided for the sole purpose of your study as you prepare to preach and lead.

CLIMATE CANDLE LIGHTING – A MODIFIED ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

In Advent 1, it was suggested that an Advent wreath connected to creation could be made from leaves and flowers or shells gathered from the sea. A koru shape was suggested, to evoke the new beginnings that are themes of Advent.

The spiral of the Advent wreath could be extended further in Advent 2 as a second candle is added and lit. Again, this could be done using leaves, flowers, or shells gathered from the sea.

The leaves and flowers might need to be refreshed. This takes time but offers a way of being present in nature. Indeed, as the weeks unfold, new flowers might be blossoming in gardens, so the different weeks speak of summer's arrival.

An Advent wreath connected to creation made from leaves, flowers, or shells gathered from the seas can be participatory. As a way of encouraging all-age participation, families and children could be invited to add to the leaves, flowers, or shells as the service starts.¹

As your wreath grows and unfurls during Advent, you could take a picture on your cellphone and email it to as at cws@cws.org.nz. (Try to avoid pictures with people in them unless they give their written permission). We might be in touch to ask your permission to share them on our social media platforms with other congregations who are also participating.

¹ For more ideas on foraged crafts that could be woven into Advent or Christmas, including fern spirals (67-70) and twig stars (75-77), see Peter Cole and Leslie Jonath, *Foraged Art: Creative projects using blooms, branches, leaves, stones, and other elements discovered in nature* (BlueStreak Books, 2018).

CLIMATE COLLECT – A PUBLIC PRAYER

(A collect is a public prayer prayed by and for the assembled church. Like the Lord’s Prayer, a collect has an address, a focus on some characteristic of God, and a petition. It concludes with a word of praise).

COLLECT FOR ADVENT 2

God of wild words and present salvation

In times past, you called your people to move earth

To dig, smooth and straighten the paths of love and justice

Renew our work, so that, like Isaiah and John the Baptist, Mrs Mafi and the Green apostles of Melanesia that we learnt of last week, we too may dig for love and act for justice

In the name of Christ, the saving One, we pray, Amen

CWS ANNOUNCEMENT –

(Each week, we provide a brief (60-second/100-word) introduction to the Give Climate Hope this Christmas appeal. The announcement could be read as part of the notices or before or after the Climate Collect).

Advent 2 - hopeful local climate solutions

In Advent 1, we met Mrs Mafi, working to make sure “No one is left behind.” As she works with her local community, they are discovering hopeful climate solutions. As they share traditional knowledge, they are finding ways to revive resilient food plants. As they revive organic gardening approaches, they are strengthening food security in their communities. The 2024 CWS Give climate hope this Christmas appeal is a way for us to give toward hopeful climate solutions for Mrs Mafi and her community. There is more information in the 2024 CWS appeal fliers.

SONGS – THAT CONNECT WITH THE SERMON IDEAS INCLUDING YOUTUBE LINKS

Singing the *Pasefika* hymn would continue to give voice to sharing Advent with our neighbours in Oceania this Advent. (We are hoping to source music, which will be at <https://tinyurl.com/pasefikahymn>). The Venerable Famausili Chris Solomona's thoughts about it being sung are special. He suggests it as "a hymn of ONENESS within the creation of God"

As with Advent 1, I acknowledge the song resource archive provided by Trinity College, Glasgow.²

On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry links to the Gospel reading from Luke 3, including the lyrics of verse 2, "make straight the way for God within," and "let us all our hearts prepare."

Through the prophets (Christ is here) by the New Scottish Hymns Band is a contemporary song that focuses on John the Baptist and has a chorus that picks up on the language of "wilderness" and "prepare the way." This YouTube clip has lyrics (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HKoAFUjGAM>)

When Out of Poverty Was Born (Church Hymnary 291) is a relevant carol. The tune is Kingsfold, and the words were written by the Rev Kathy Galloway, former Head of our CWS partner Christian Aid Scotland and Church of Scotland minister. The chorus ends with the line "Be blessed, Prepare the way," which resonates strongly with the Gospel reading. This carol will be suggested again during Advent 4, so if it is new, singing it twice during Advent can be worthwhile.

The Godspell song *Prepare Ye The Way Of The Lord*, while set in a distinct time and place, works with the Gospel reading and could resonate with people formed during the 1970s. Check out https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuUI522_8jQ.

² <https://www.trinitycolleg Glasg ow.co.uk/songs-for-sunday/>.

CREATIVE IDEAS THAT ENGAGE A RANGE OF GENERATIONS (CAN BE USED AS A CHILDREN'S TALK)

(This talk includes checking out rain gauges in Oceania. I googled actual daily rainfall Solomon Islands. I also googled actual daily rainfall Tonga. I found websites providing data from weather stations at the International airports on Tonga

(<https://www.wunderground.com/weather/to/nuku'alofa>)

and Solomon Island

(<https://www.wunderground.com/weather/sb/honiara>)

Last week we made a rain gauge. It was a way of connecting with the words in Luke 21:36 about keeping watch. We talked about watching for love and justice and praying for people taking action as part of God's redemption.

Did anyone make a rain gauge between last week and this week?

If yes, how was it? What was the easiest bit? What was the hardest bit?

Now, the point of a rain gauge is to check for rain. During Advent, we are thinking about climate and our neighbours in Oceania.

So this week, I thought we could check out the rain gauge in another country. In the Solomon Islands, they are putting rain gauges on local church buildings. They are training priests and church people to look for love and justice by watching the rain gauge.

So here is a photo of a rain gauge in the Solomon Islands.



³Green Apostles, many of whom are church ministers at Walande village, in Malaita Province, install the new rain gauge for the ACoM Environmental Observatory, October 2019.

So, any guesses how much rain fell yesterday in the Solomon Islands?

With the wonders of the internet, here are readings from a rain gauge in the Solomon Islands.

(Note this is from the Honiara International Airport Weather Station. You could either take a screen shot or connect your computer live if you can share to a screen).

<https://www.wunderground.com/weather/sb/honiara>

Point out the forecast for today and tomorrow and the map of where the station is.

Then click on "precipitation" on the left side of the website to get the rain accumulated and the rain forecast).

Next week, we will guess how much rain falls during a cyclone, or really bad storm! So this week, as part of Advent, let's keep watching—watching for rain, watching for love and justice.

So, a prayer, like what we prayed last week:

³ Photo caption "Green Apostles at Walande village, in Malaita Province, install the new rain gauge for the ACoM Environmental Observatory, October 2019." Photo part of an article titled 'Apostles' monitor life at sea level." *Church Times* October 21, 2021, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/22-october/features/features/apostles-monitor-life-at-sea-level>. Photo reproduced from *Church Times* and used with permission. To subscribe to *Church Times*, go to www.churchtimes.co.uk/subscribe.

God, we thank you for rain gauges. We thank you for how rain gauges help us keep watch and pay attention to rain and weather. Help us as we keep watch, not only for rain but also for your kingdom come, your love and justice being done, here on earth as it is in heaven.

SERMON IDEAS –

(The suggested lectionary Gospel reading for Advent 2 is Luke 3:1-6. The sermon ideas below suggest four points. You can build a sermon around one, two or three of these points, depending on how long your church tradition preaches for. If you use all four points, there is some repetition of information that you might want to edit to enhance the flow of the sermon.

*Regarding **Point 2- Moving earth, ecojustice and our heads**– material in this section requires more thoughtful reflection on how we read the Bible ecologically. It might bring to the surface underlying questions about the nature of Scripture and how ancient texts are interpreted in our present times. For globally-minded and environmentally aware people, this material could be stimulating. For others, the underlying ideas might be theologically or conceptually challenging. You know your congregation, and I hope you will pick and mix from the sermon material and the various points in ways that fit most appropriately with the culture of your congregation.*

*For those who might draw on materials from **Point 2 - Moving earth, ecojustice and our heads**, a significant resource for me has been Michael Trainor's, *About Earth's Child. An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke, The Earth Bible Commentary* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), Trainor describes how he interprets the Gospel of Luke using ecojustice principles, taken from *Readings from the Perspective of Earth, Earth Bible, Volume 1, Series 1* (2001). I have uploaded some relevant selections for those who like to do their own research.*

A one-page summary of ecojustice principles in reading Scripture

-> <https://tinyurl.com/EcojusticePrinciples>

A fuller explanation of the ecojustice principles

-> <https://tinyurl.com/EcojusticeReading>

These are provided for the sole purposes of your study as you prepare to preach and lead).

Point 1 - Wild words

As you listened to the Scriptures being read, what did you do when you heard the details? Did you tune in? Or did you let it wash over you? The first two verses of Luke 3 are stuffed full of details:

First, the date detail – the 15th year.

Second the name detail – Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias, Annas, Caiaphas.

Third, the geographic detail – Judea, Galilee, Iturea, Traconitus, Abilene.

Fourth the power details – reign; Emperor; governor; ruler; high priesthood.

Two whole verses loaded with detail – 18 data points - dates, names, geography, power – in the space of two verses. The detail locates us in time and place, among real people with real concerns.

And once located, once embedded in real life, real people, real power, the single phrase, in verse 2, "the word of God came ... in the wilderness." Words of God– wild words of God – not in the detail, not in places of power, not in places of politics or religious influence.

Words – wild words of God - are repeated again in verse 4. In case you missed it amid the detail - "in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord."

The one word “wilderness” - repeated twice - is doing a whole lot of work.

The wilderness is where God’s Spirit first breathed, as the Spirit hovered over the waters in Genesis 1:2. A wild word of creation – breathed in a vast expanse of darkness, formless and void.

The wilderness is where God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, revealed as “I am who I am” in Exodus 3:15. The wilderness is where God's ancient people of Israel fled from Pharaoh. The wilderness is where God was revealed in the 10 commandments. Wild words around which the people of Israel began to form an identity, nurture character, and the building of their faith. In the wild are words – that form, test, refine, shape.

Is it because things are clearer in the wild? Less people. Less politics. Less pressure.

Is it because there’s less noise in the wild? In the places of solitude, wild words are able to emerge.

One spiritual practice worth considering during Advent is to seek silence. To set a timer and sit for a minute before we eat an evening meal. To set a timer for 5 minutes before we turn out the light. To take advantage of daylight saving and slip out for one silent evening walk a week. No talking. Just walking. Pondering wild words.

Point 2 - Moving earth, ecojustice and our heads

“Prepare the way” – make straight – every valley filled – the crooked made smooth

I go in two directions as I hear these phrases from Luke 3:4-6. One is toward our hands, the other is toward our heads. Our heads first.

With my head, I ask, what happens to earth when you move it, straighten it, and smooth it?

Thinking about earth and soil, US biologist EO Wilson observed, "When you thrust a shovel into the soil or tear off a piece of coral, you are, godlike, cutting through an entire world ... the ground dwellers are the heart of life on Earth. The terrain they inhabit is not just a matrix of dirt and rubble. The entire ground habitat is alive. Living forms create virtually all of the substances that flow around the inert grains."⁴

Soil has:

Microfungi - that live around plant roots, especially in undisturbed soils.

Earthworms - around 100 to 500 squiggly earthworms can live beneath 0.8 square metres of grassland or forest.

Nematodes - around 10 million unsegmented worms can live beneath 0.8 square metres of soil.

Arthropods - in a 0.8 square metre patch of soil live around 500 to 200,000 crawlies, including beetles, ants, wood lice, spiders and mites, centipedes and scorpions.

Bacteria - a teaspoon of healthy soil can contain between 100 million and 1 billion bacteria.

I'll repeat that in case you missed it – 1 teaspoon of healthy soil can contain between 100 million and 1 billion bacteria!

Archaea - can withstand extreme conditions. Hence, they become the dominant microbes in salty, acidic or highly alkaline soils.⁵

⁴ From "A world of life in a single cubic foot," <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/nov/11/world-in-cubic-foot-david-liittschwager>

⁵ Data from Catherine Arnold, "Soil (and its inhabitants) by the numbers," *Science News Explores* <https://www.snexplores.org/article/soil-and-its-inhabitants-by-the-numbers>

So thinking with my head, what happens to all these creatures when you move earth, make straight, fill and smooth the crooked road?

Continuing to think with my head, I think about how what's in the soil below supports the plants we see above. A special feature of Israel's deserts are the richness and variety of its flora, especially wildflowers. Between mid-January and mid-April, Israel's wildflowers bloom in an amazing variety of shapes and colours. Israel has over 2500 species - compared with only 1500 species in the British Isles - of wildflowers and grasses.

What happens to wildflowers when the earth is moved, valleys filled, and mountains straightened?

Thinking with my head, could these phrases in Luke 3:4-6 - "prepare the way" - make straight - every valley shall be filled - the crooked road made smooth" - be used to justify causing harm to bacteria and earthworms and wildflowers.

To use contemporary language, could you use this Bible passage to justify environmental damage like strip mining or bottom trawling which destroys valuable marine ecosystems and reef structures?

To help us think - with our heads - about reading the Bible ecologically, one place to turn is the Earth Bible commentary series. The Earth Bible commentary series makes several points about Luke 3:4-6 that are relevant to thinking with our head about reading the Bible ecologically.

First, a feature of Luke 3:4-6 is how the earth is described as part of bringing change in humans. Earthmoving and straightening and smoothing are so that humans (verse 6) shall see the salvation of God. So, the reading suggests that the earth is important not because we can mine it. Earth is important because it's how God calls humans to change, to prepare God's way.

Second, in verse 6, Luke uses the phrase "all flesh." Other writers at the time of Luke, like Josephus, used the phrase "all flesh" to include the whole of the non-human world. So, as Luke writes of all flesh seeing God's salvation, this includes bacteria, earthworms and wildflowers.

This is why I find the Give climate hope this Christmas appeal so encouraging. And so challenging.

In 2007, the Pacific Conference of Churches spoke. 27 Pacific member Churches and 11 National Council of Churches (NCCs)

"We call on our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change. We issue this call particularly to churches in the highly industrialised nations whose societies are historically responsible for the majority of polluting emissions. We further urge these countries to take responsibility for the ecological damage that they have caused by paying for the costs of adaptation to anticipated impacts."⁶

Prepare the way. Make paths straight. Take action so that "all flesh" can see God's salvation.

Point 3 - Moving earth, ecojustice and our hands

That's with our heads. That's one direction from Luke 3:4-6. The second direction is with my hands.

Because the Christian World Service Give Climate hope resources this Christmas introduce us to Mrs Mafi.

Mrs Mafi is a wife, mother, and grandmother who lives on the eastern coast of Tonga. Along her coast line, rising seas are impacting the daily life for her and her community. High tides damage vegetable gardens and heavy rain floods low-lying homes.

⁶ PCC General Assembly on Climate Change, Statement from the 9th Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches on Climate Change, 3-9th September, 2007, p. 20.

Working with the women in her community and the Tongan Community Development Trust, Mrs Mafi is taking hopeful action in response to climate change. Together, they are establishing new vegetable gardens on higher ground.

As I hear Mrs Mafi's share about digging new gardens, I connect it in my heart with Luke 3:1-6 – she and her community are moving earth, making new paths and smoothing rough soil.

Mrs Mafi and her community are giving climate hope as they dig gardens and move earth. So Luke 3:1-6 is not just what happened at the time of Jesus. It's part of what it means for people today, for our neighbours in Oceania.

Mrs Mafi works with a Christian faith. With a smile she speaks of faith, that "with God's guidance, her community will find the right alternative in action to our resilient needs."

Climate hope for Mrs Mafi is not something passive. Preparing the way is faith with action – moving earth, digging gardens, sharing resources, people working together.

Mrs Mafi is a 'hands-on' response to the Climate call from the Pacific Conference of Churches. In 2007, those 27 Pacific member Churches and 11 National Council of Churches called for "church-related specialized ministries for emergency response, development and advocacy to integrate climate change and adaptation projects into their policy- development, education and advocacy."⁷

Preparing the way, digging gardens is adaptation, taking alternative action to increase resiliency in communities in Oceania.

Point 4- Seeing salvation

⁷ PCC General Assembly on Climate Change, Statement from the 9th Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches on Climate Change, 3-9th September, 2007, p. 20.

Luke 3:6 – All flesh - While some translations use "all mankind," a more accurate translation is "all flesh." That's based on other writers at the time of Luke, like Josephus, who used the phrase "all flesh" to mean the whole of the non-human world.

It's tempting to limit salvation to humans. But as the other places in Scripture remind us, creation celebrates God's love and justice in the world. Mountains and hills break into songs of joy, trees clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12). Stones cry out (Luke 19:20).

Luke 3:6 – All flesh - seeing God's salvation.

It's such an interesting phrase; "See salvation." Not hear salvation with our ears. But "see salvation" with our eyes.

It's tempting to spiritualise salvation, to reduce it to a set of intellectual beliefs, some words to hear once a week on a Sunday. Yet the way of Jesus, love and justice, the drawing near of God's salvation, is something to "see" in "all flesh."

Conclusion

All of this is both challenging and encouraging.

Encouraging because we can "see salvation" already, in the actions of Mrs Mafi and the women of her village in Tonga we are seeing faith in action, adapting and learning and resilient.

Challenging because we live in a culture and a climate in which faith needs our actions as well as our words. Actions of care for neighbour, actions of preparing, moving, straightening, working together.

CLIMATE PRAYERS FOR THE EARTH AND ALL THINGS

(A prayer for the earth and all things could go in two directions. One direction is to use again the poem by Mary Oliver, titled "Instructions for living a life." This will build continuity for those regularly present while being something fresh for others. A second direction is to pray

using a climate prayer for Oceania written by Archbishop Emeritus Winston Halapua).

Pray using the poem by Mary Oliver

Direction one is to use Mary Oliver's poem "Instructions for living a life" and the three phrases "Pay attention," "Be astonished," and "Tell about it" to frame a prayer.⁸

Below, I provide an example. The three phrases from the Mary Oliver poem are bolded. I then offer some words, imagining I am praying in my local congregation drawing from Luke 3:1-6. However, given your unique context and that I wrote this in September in a rapidly changing world, I also offer some prompting questions (in italics) that could help you connect the phrases with your local congregation and contemporary community needs in December.

God of all things,

We pray using the words of Mary Oliver.

Pay attention – We hear the call in the Gospel of Luke to act by moving the earth. And so we pay attention to places where the earth is moving in climate injustice,

We mourn with those impacted by rising tides in Oceania, for those ravaged by floods and cyclones

We pray for those working for adaptation, those offering emergency aid and those providing longer-term care after trauma

What might God be calling us to pay attention to? Is there something from the Gospel reading, the life of the congregation, the current news, or the CWS Give climate hope this Christmas brochure?

⁸ Excerpted from the poem "Sometimes," from Red Bird, Boston: Beacon Press, 2009, page 37.

Be astonished – As we think about seeing salvation, we are astonished to hear of acts of climate hope

We are thankful for your gifts of adaptability and resilience among our neighbours in Oceania, like Mrs Mafi and communities across Oceania

We pray for creativity for organisations like Tonga Community Development Trust, CWS and many others

We pray for persistence for those seeking global policy changes, including Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change and the Pacific Conference of Churches

Where is seeing salvation bringing surprise? What can we be thankful for?

Tell about it – As we think about the love and justice of God's salvation,

We pray for those in our local congregation and community who face injustice, those who are pre-judged by their appearances, those who experience racism,

We pray for the ministries of our congregation and community who share in words and deeds God's love and justice, including

And we pray together, using the words that Jesus taught us to pray
(The Lord's Prayer)

What does sharing in words and deeds mean in God's Kingdom coming? What local ministries could we name before God?

Pray using a climate prayer from the Diocese of Polynesia

Direction two is to pray using a climate prayer for Oceania written by then Archbishop of Tikanga Pasifika, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, Winston Halapua. You can say the prayer (words below) or have it prayed to you using the video link, in which

Archbishop Emeritus Winston Halapua reads the prayer. "A Pacific Prayer for the Moana - Archbishop Emeritus Winston Halapua," (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQBbwQZrhkM>).

Written by Archbishop Emeritus Winston Halapua

Loving and Embracing God,

You are the God of the universe and all Creation.

You create and give life, and see that your Creation is good.

We praise you for your gift of Creation.

We thank you for the Moana.

We thank you the great Oceans flowing into one another
and around the continents and islands.

We thank you for the life-giving of the Oceans,
for the oxygen, food and resources they continually provide.

We thank you that the Ocean is the home for most species, small and
great.

We are people of the Moana.

Our ancestors navigated by the stars and crossed the waves to find
new homes.

The waves breaking on the reef thunder with the message
of your constancy and your love and care for Creation.

May we hear the voices of sea creatures endangered by the selfish greed of humanity.

May there be a deep listening to the voice of waters rising to engulf land.

May ears be open to the groaning caused by refusal to honour Creation.

May eyes be open to the suffering caused by power which destroys.

We beat a lali drum, alerting people around Planet Earth to the destruction of nature and human life threatened by climate change.

We blow a conch, calling for the worship of a God of immense goodness.

Our forbears set out across the Moana.

We set out on a venture to protect our home – the Planet Earth.

Help us to challenge short-sighted greed,

Help us to address unjust structures and practices

and to change our relationship with creation to one of care.

We affirm our guardianship of the precious gift of Creation.

We have a vision. We have courage. We have your guidance.

We have the presence of the Risen One

whose power to love is greater than all the powers of destruction.

Grant that together we may bring peace to our Planet Earth,

to its many creatures and its many people.

We lotu (pray) in the name of our God –

Creator, Redeemer and Life-giving Spirit. Amen.