

GIVE CLIMATE HOPE THIS CHRISTMAS

**Christmas Day worship and
teaching resources**



“No one is left behind.” Mrs Mafi

Christian World Service 2024

CHRISTMAS: WRAPPED IN BANDS OF LOVE

The suggested lectionary Gospel reading for Christmas day is Luke 2:1-16.

A Christ candle can be placed at the centre of the Advent koru. An all-age talk invites a wondering about the materiality of the cloth in which Jesus was wrapped. *Ocean Carol*, by Sue Halapua, is suggested as a weaving of resources from Oceania. While the excitement of Christmas provides many ways to engage the Gospel reading, the sermon ideas continue an environmental focus consistent with the CWS theme for 2024 of Give Climate hope this Christmas. A climate collect and a climate prayers for the earth and all things works again with themes around climate hope developed through Advent.

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.

Then, during Advent 2, 3 and 4, it was suggested that the spiral of the Advent wreath be extended each week, with further candles added and lit. Families and children could be invited to add to leaves, flowers, or shells as the service starts to encourage all-age participation. Leaves and flowers will need to be refreshed, especially by Advent 4 and Christmas. This takes time but offers a way of being present in nature.¹

At Christmas, a white Christ candle can be placed at the centre of the Advent koru. This action provides a visual symbol of Christ as the initiator of new beginnings, around whom creation centres and spirals.

(The sermon works with this imagery of Christ at the centre, wrapped in the earth's care and embrace).

SONGS AS SPOKEN WORDS

Given a wide range of carols can be unfurled with joy on Christmas Day, I provide only one suggestion, a Pacific carol that could be read as a poem.

The words for *Ocean Carol* were written by Susan Halapua and originally appeared in Winston Halapua, *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean*, Canterbury Press: Norwich, 2008, pp. 84-5. In recent correspondence with Sue to gain permission

¹ For more ideas on the foraged craft 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).

for use as part of this years Christmas appeal, CWS was kindly provided with some updated words (below).

The Ocean Carol

Mary smiles and rocks her Baby to sleep.

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

Jesus is born for us, we've heard.

we'll pass it on and spread the word:

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

Wise men nod and shepherds leave their sheep.

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

so let us kneel and worship him:

just where we are - is Bethlehem.

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

Children laugh and waves for gladness leap:

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

The sunshine of our hearts is here,

to chase away our dark and fear.

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

Islands sing! Wake up from drowsy sleep!

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

The Manger, Cross and Cave declare:

that all may now God's glory share.

God's love is deeper than our Ocean deep.

CLIMATE COLLECT

God of love and life,

Help us, like Mary and Joseph, to wrap your son in love this
Christmas morning

To nurture your presence and treasure your warmth

To celebrate your unfurling passion for truth and justice

Through Christ and in the Spirit's hovering presence over
creation, we pray, Amen.

CWS ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Christmas CWS focus – Give Climate hope this Christmas

The CWS Christmas appeal for 2024 invites us to give generously toward climate hope this Christmas. CWS works through local partners across Oceania and around the globe. Capacity builds because local communities generate local solutions.

During Advent, we met Mrs Mafi and local communities in Oceania working to ensure that "No one is left behind."

Christian faith, indeed Christmas faith, powers Mrs Mafi. She values a spirituality of small actions and a sharing of compassion in her community. This Christmas, will you give toward climate

hope in communities across Oceania? There is more information, including how to give, in the CWS 2024 Give Climate hope this Christmas fliers.

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

(This links with Luke 2 and Jesus being wrapped in cloth. The focus is on touch, and you could find several different materials to pass around, for example, sacking, linen and wool).²

Since today is Christmas, I want to talk about Jesus' baby clothes. In the Bible, we read that he was wrapped in bands of cloth. It doesn't actually say what type of cloth. So our task today is to wonder together what kind of baby clothes could be the best for a brand new baby.

Now, I have here 3 types of material here, similar to the bands of cloth made in Jesus' day.

Wool was taken from sheep and woven into clothes.

Sackcloth was taken from goats or camels.

Linen was made from flax.

So a question for us. Which material would be best for wrapping a baby? Why do you think this (linen) is better than this (sackcloth)?

There are four reasons why I think linen was the best of these 3 bands of cloth to wrap Jesus in.

First, linen was greatly prized. It was what special people wore.

² Several resources I drew on preparing were "Linen in early times - the Egyptians!" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUHu6eduKY0> and "Flax-Linen in history," <https://allianceflaxlinenhemp.eu/en/all-about-european-linen/flax-linen-in-history>.

Second, linen is connected with the earth. It's natural. For people in the time of Jesus, cloth made from plants grown from the earth was greatly prized

Third, linen was the best cloth to wear. It's smooth. It breaths like cotton, so you don't get all hot and sweaty. It weighs less, so it's easy to carry. This is important if you're walking from Nazareth to Bethlehem like Jesus' parents were.

Fourth, linen has the longest history. 7,000 years ago, flax farming and linen weaving were fundamental to the economy of ancient Egypt. 5,000 years ago, linen was exported to places like Scotland, Persia, India and China.

So, we don't know what cloth Jesus was wrapped in. But we do know that linen is the best cloth to wrap a baby in.

Prayer

Loving God,

We thank you for this special day.

We thankyou for the birth of a baby, Jesus, the son of God,

Today we think about wrapping the baby Jesus.

As a way of saying you are precious. You are a gift.

We want to treat you with love and tender care.

Help us care for you as you care for us.

Amen.

SERMON CHRISTMAS DAY

(Give Climate hope this Christmas is the CWS theme for 2024. The theme emerged from listening to partners in Oceania and call to "make ocean front and centre of our church, the message, the preaching, the

*discussions, the intercessions, the prayers.”³ While there is no direct mention of oceans in Luke 2:1-16, connections to the environment are made visible in Michael Trainor's book, *About Earth's Child. An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012). The sermon ideas below suggest a rich ecological Christology woven into the story and message of Christmas.)*

Introduction: Look down

We often approach Christmas looking back. We hear a reading of the Gospel of Luke that looks back to things that happened 2,000 years ago when Augustus was Ceasar and Quirinius governor of Syria. So, we look back and reflect on how the events of 2000 years ago connect with our life and faith today.

We can approach Christmas looking back. We can also approach Christmas looking up. We hear a reading of the Gospel of Luke that describes angels and heavenly hosts. We look up, straining to hear a song of peace and goodwill for humankind. How we need songs of peace in our communities and world today.

Today, rather than look back or up, I want to look down. Down at the earth. Down at creation and the environment that impacts each of us every day.

In the lead-up to Christmas this year, we've been thinking about oceans and rain gauges and digging gardens and how good news has environmental consequences. So this Christmas, we're looking down, thinking about earth, creation, and the environment.

Two phrases from our Gospel reading help us look down and think about the earth and the environment.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/3CDMeWJ32xXii7it/>.

Wrapped in bands of cloth

In verse 7, the baby is wrapped in bands of cloth. Again in verse 12, in case we miss it.

In the time of Jesus, cloth – what the baby was wrapped in - was made from natural products. Not synthetics but flax that was turned into linen, wool that was washed, woven and worn, goat and camel hair that was turned into sackcloth.

We don't know exactly what type of cloth. (Although we did wonder in our Creative ideas time). But the baby was wrapped in cloth - from earth. Not manufactured but natural. From creation and the environment.

Natural fibres touching human skin. The handmade work of human hands enfolding God's Son. The phrase "wrapped by bands of cloth" offers caring, natural, earthy, and environmental connections.

Lying in a manger

Also in verse 7, lying in a manger. Again in verse 12. Then again, in verse 16. In case we miss it!!

A manger is a spot within a stable. Most Israelite homes housed the animals belonging to the family. Animals and humans slept in one large room. The animals were usually on a lower level, and the humans slept on a raised dais. The manger was within the room, usually as a way of separating animals and humans.

In the 4th century, Jerome, who was the first person to translate the Bible into Latin, described the manger as a rock groove with plain clay walls in the side of a cave.

So the baby is laid in a rock groove, clay walls either side, surrounded by animals. Lying in a manger is repeated in Luke 2 three times and this affirms Jesus' connection to the earth and to animals.

One Bible commentary calls Jesus, Earth's Child, God's Son who lives in communion with creation. Wrapped in natural cloth, surrounded by animals, cradled in rock and earth.

These images of connection provide climate hope this Christmas.

God comes not to rule over creation, but to live in partnership with the environment,

God is birthed not to harm the environment,

But to be wrapped in warmth by bands of natural cloth,

God is placed cradled in rocks of protection,

To be watched by animals with wonder.

An image of relationships of care and mutuality. Earth's Child, God's Son wrapped in natural cloth, cradled by creation.

Conclusion

The angel said to the shepherds, 'You will find a baby wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger' (Lk. 2.12).

Which has caused me to offer what is not a traditional Christmas reflection. There are times to look back to history. There are times to look up for angelic songs of peace. Today is a time to look down. To focus on creation and environment and make sense of those two phrases repeated five times through Luke chapter 2, "wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

At the start of the service, we lit a white candle. As a sign of Christ, the candle was placed at the centre of the koru. It gives climate hope this Christmas.

Climate hope is because the Earth child, who is God's Son, is at the beginning, initiating new things, new unfoldings, and new ways of relating, being, and connecting in creation.

Climate hope because the Earth child is at the centre, a tiny baby, shaping all relationships, energising all connections of vulnerable love, and forming all imaginations.

Climate hope because the Earth child, who is God's Son, is growing like a koru, ever-expanding and ever-expressing God's love and care for the world.

Such is climate hope this Christmas.

"Earth speaks: I wrap him, this new born child, Saviour and God's gift to humanity. I surround him with gifts that I treasure, I wrap him in cloth of eternity's flax, fruit of my seed. I have him placed in a manger fashioned from my body. I want to surround this child with myself, to protect him. I love him. He is mine and I am his. He is my child."⁴

Prayers for the climate and all things

(As with services through Advent, one direction is to utilise the poem by Mary Oliver, titled "Instructions for living a life" and the three phrases Pay attention; Be astonished; Tell about it to frame a prayer.⁵

I provide an example below. The three phrases from the Mary Oliver poem are bolded. I then provide some words, imagining I am praying in my own local congregation drawing from Luke 3:7-16. 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 this Christmas Day.)

God of all things,

⁴ Michael Trainor, *About Earth's Child. An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke*, The Earth Bible Commentary (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), p. 95.

⁵ Excerpted from the poem "Sometimes," from Red Bird, Boston: Beacon Press, 2009, page 37.

We pray using the words of Mary Oliver.

Pay attention –

We join with creation, household animals and rock walls

flax and plants; sheep, goats and camels

angels, heavenly hosts,

We gather with joy around God's gift of love and life.

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?

Be astonished

God of the manger, As we look back, up and down, We find you in such unexpected places.

Keep surprising us, keep reminding us that you are God and grace is undeserved.

Where is God bringing surprise? What can we be thankful for?

Tell about it

God who through Mary wraps your Son the Earth Child in bands of cloth.

We hold before you those who love, care and protect us this day

Those working in hospitals and the public sector,

Those working in justice and development at home and overseas,

Those seeking peace and justice in war-torn places,

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

What does sharing words and deeds in the good news mean? What local expressions of good news could we name before God?