



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

WEEKLY UPDATE

December 20, 2023

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 50

UCJCI 42nd SYNOD THEME – **Rooted, Resilient: Responding in HOPE** (Health, Opportunity, Peace, Evangelism)

Advent 4 – LOVE

During the first three Sundays -and weeks- of Advent, Christians worldwide focused on the themes of Hope, Peace, and Joy as essential aspects of our faith. Now that we have arrived at the final week of this season, we complete our spiritual journey and preparation for Christmas by focusing on Love.

The miracle of Christmas is the wonderful Love of God, which was poured out into this world and into every heart that is ready to receive Jesus. He is the Love of God in human form, the Love Incarnate, the embodiment of God's Love.

The Love of God, Jesus, breathes life into the deepest part of our broken and wayward hearts. It changes and transforms us into a new being, a new creation.

How comforting and empowering it is to know, embrace, and be embraced by this amazing Love. Amid our loneliness, confusion, pain, grief, hopelessness, and disillusionment, He comes, and in Him, we find acceptance, understanding, healing, hope, peace, and joy. Jesus is the greatest gift of all: priceless, free and much-needed!

Indeed, for these reasons, we celebrate! We celebrate His coming. We celebrate His rich, abundant, and unconditional Love on Christmas Day and every day.

*“For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.”
(John 3:16)*



Vessels of God

Rev. Otto Menko

Please read Luke 1:26–38

The Gospel account of Luke chapter 1:26-38 is commonly called 'The Annunciation'. It describes the moment when the angel Gabriel visits Mary to inform her that she will conceive and give birth to a son, whom she is to name Jesus. This child will be great and called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David, and His kingdom will have no end. Mary, being a virgin, questions how this can happen since she has not been with a man. Gabriel explains that the Holy Spirit will come upon her, and the power of the Most High will overshadow her.

The narrative makes it clear that Mary had a choice to make. Had she chosen differently, her life could have followed the expected path of a typical woman in first-century Galilee—marriage, bearing children, and a life rooted in the conventional roles assigned to women of that time. However, she responded to God's plan with trust and submission. That decision had far-reaching implications for her, transforming the trajectory of her existence in ways that extended beyond the initial act of conceiving and giving birth to Jesus.

For that was only the beginning. Mary accepted and dedicated herself entirely to her role for the rest of her life. She was not a surrogate mother but a real one. She was pregnant for nine months, gave birth, loved, nurtured, protected, and taught Jesus. When He became a grown man and left home to carry out His ministry, Mary's heart and soul accompanied Him wherever He went. She missed Him, worried for Him, suffered with Him and, in the end, mourned Him.

Mary's commitment was not a one-time event but a continual surrender to the unfolding of God's plan that shaped the entirety of her life. Her role as the earthly vessel for the incarnation of God's Son holds profound spiritual ramifications.

Mary was a vessel of the Son of God as she physically carried Jesus in her body for the duration of her pregnancy. The vessel, as an imagery, is not foreign to us. It implies how we are to consider ourselves in our relationship to Christ.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (ESV) The Apostle points out that when we believe in Christ, it is like

joining in his death and getting a brand-new life. It is not just us living anymore; Christ is living in us.

Paul continues, "And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." In this sense, as vessels, we are more than mere containers; the indwelling Christ's goal is to transform us from the inside out. Paul emphasizes the transformative nature of faith in Christ. It is as if the Apostle was saying, 'You think you see me, Paul, living my life, talking, teaching, working, going about my business, but it is Christ who lives in me; it is Christ who does all that, for the original Paul is dead. The Paul you see is Christ in Paul's body.' In a spiritual sense, Christ became incarnate, embodied, through Paul.

Is this something that applies only to Paul? On the contrary, every child of God is called to embody Christ, to make Him visible through their unique character and context. Our identity is to be infused and intertwined with Christ. It is not just about stopping our old ways and adopting a new set of beliefs but about a profound identification, union, and surrender that allows Christ to be our central guiding force.

Mary offered herself as a living vessel to carry the Son of God, and her role was a unique, unrepeatable historical event. But from that moment on, she surrendered the rest of her life to God's plan and purpose. When we turned in faith to God, accepted the forgiveness of our sins and became children of God, we also became vessels of God by carrying the living Christ in our bodies, according to Paul, and like Mary. We must surrender the rest of our lives to God's plan and purpose.

This passage conveys the life-changing spiritual union between Christ and believers through faith. Christ's presence, influence, and transformative power become a living reality within us through our faith and obedience. It is in complete agreement with the broader biblical theme of believers being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and growing in conformity to the image of Christ.

Mary's story and Paul's confession speak to us across time, encouraging us to embrace our role as carriers of the living Christ. **We all are vessels of God and called to embody Christ, His nature, character, attitude and mind.**

The Commissioning of Pastoral Assistant, Ms. Catherine Gomez

On Sunday, December 10, 2023, Ms. Catherine Gomez was commissioned as the Pastoral Assistant for the Robert Young Memorial Mission Station (George Town). Ms. Gomez has training and experience in counselling and has been serving as a pianist at the Mission Station. Her primary duties as Pastoral Assistant include preaching and offering pastoral care.

She was commissioned by the Chair of Council, Rev Rohan Forrester, who also preached the sermon. The Regional Deputy General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Yvette Noble-Bloomfield, read the narrative. Supervising Minister Rev. L. Christopher Mason

served as Liturgist. Ms. Gomez commenced her duties at the Mission Station on October 1, 2023.



(From left: Rev. L. Christopher Mason, Ms. Catherine Gomez, Rev. Rohan Forrester and Rev. Dr. Yvette Noble-Bloomfield)

WCC Christmas Message

Source: WCC (oikoumene.org)



In a special Christmas message, Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), invites every Christian to defy despair, live for the truth and strive for the redemption of the world.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it –John 1:3-5

“In so many ways we, and our whole world, are living through a time of darkness, when mounting challenges threaten to diminish our hope, to overwhelm our will to meet the evident needs and palpable pains of our day, and even to sap our dedication to truth and justice.

Yet, as disciples of Jesus and as Christian communities united in Christ's love, we are called to stand up to fear, counter falsehood, challenge selfishness and greed, and offer hope to the whole world.

We cannot acquiesce in disappointment nor succumb to despair. The world needs more from us— more courage, more creativity, more inspiration and dedication. More self-giving love.

From where do we source such energy and life?

Remarkably, we Christians find that strength in the birth of a weak and vulnerable baby, born 2,000 years ago into poverty at the far edge of empire in Bethlehem, Palestine, soon to be endangered by evil powers and displaced in exile.

In this poor child we recognize the heir of the great Jewish prophetic tradition of justice, the one who proclaimed God's nearness and our dearness, the one in whom his followers came to see the very image of God and the promise of a New Creation.

In his birth, we welcome God's own Son now immanent, the epiphany of God embodied in our humanity, sharing our nature and lifting us to share in his. He is Immanuel - God with us forever.

No wonder the angels sing, the shepherds kneel, and the very stars shine brightly.

Our celebration of the birth of Jesus is thus our defiance of despair, our yes to life and hope. He is our light in a time of darkness, enabling us to live for the truth and to strive for the redemption of the world.

Children of the light, we will not settle, nor let others settle, for a world lethally scarred by violence, seared by heat, or darkened by fear. We will not acquiesce in the devolution of democracies nor the misuse of religion nor pandering to prejudice.

Therefore, as we, Christians everywhere celebrate the birth of the Messiah—God's countersign to a world that sometimes seems bent on self-destruction—we in the World Council of Churches share with you our heartfelt joy. We redouble our resolve to labour tirelessly with you for the health and healing of the sick, a fair economy, the well-being of migrants and displaced people, peace and security for all, the advancement of human rights and dignity, deeper community in faith, and the flowering of justice for women, for children, for the earth itself.

So let us rejoice! The light of Christ promises to banish our darkness. May it brighten our spirits and warm our hearts. May it light our way, illuminating our journey to wholeness, to authentic discipleship, to justice and to peace on earth. May the love and light of Jesus fill our hearts and lives this Christmas and always!"



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

PATIENCE IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGES

FELLOWSHIP BREAKFAST

Speaker **REV. DONOVAN MYERS**

\$35

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2024
TIME: 8AM - 10AM
VENUE: MORRITT'S, EAST END

Remember in your prayers

All those God has placed on your heart and those brought to your attention in some way. Please also include in your prayers especially

- The bereaved
- The sick and ill
- Those going through a challenging time
- Those before an important decision
- Those needing guidance, support, or encouragement
- Those who feel lost and hopeless,
- Those caught in the middle of armed conflicts, persecuted, mistreated, exploited, disenfranchised, or abused.

on Radio Cayman 89.9 every Sunday at 7:45 am

December 24, 2023
Rev. Otto Menko

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