

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

Second Sunday of Advent – December 5, 2021

Words of Welcome

Darkness, not just being in the dark physically, but being in the dark emotionally or spiritually, these are things most people face at some point in their lives. Where do we find hope when we feel in the dark? Scripture may be a guide for us.

We also note that today is the Second Sunday of Advent and so we begin with a call to worship that draws our attention to the peace of Christ and the light of the Advent candle.

Call to Worship: Waiting in Peace

What are you waiting for?

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body, you were called to peace. And be thankful.

**Lord, you establish peace for us;
all that we have accomplished you have done for us.**

Where is your peace?

Submit to God and be at peace with him;
in this way prosperity will come to you.

Peace comes with Christ.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!"

Peace is near: God with us!

Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

The birth of Christ is the birth of peace.

**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

—Adapted from Colossians 3:15; Isaiah 26:12; Job 22:21; Luke 2:13–14; Romans 16:20; Psalm 85:9–10; Romans 5:1

Advent Candle Lighting – The Candle of Peace

Advent is a time of waiting.
We wait in hope.

[*The first candle is lit.*]

As we wait, we join the Spirit's work in spreading peace wherever our lives take us.
And as peace spreads, so does Christ's light.
Today, we light the candle of peace.
As we wait, let us be people of peace.

[*The second candle is lit.*]

Chris Walker. What are you waiting for – A Series for Advent and Christmas – Reformed Worship September 2021.

Hymn

Before the world began

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1. Before the world began
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made;
in him was love displayed;
through him God spoke, and said,
“I am for you.”
2. Life found in him its source;
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend,
for neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout:
“I am for you.”
3. The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognized he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
“I am for you.”
4. All who received the Word
by God were blessed;
sisters and brothers they
of earth's fond guest.
So did the Word of Grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
“I am with you.”

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of peace and promise,
you are the giver of life, living in us through the power of your Holy Spirit.
You are the voice that calls us from our wandering,
setting us on a new path.
You are the living water that purifies us,
baptising us for service in the world that so badly needs your love.
Refresh us in this time of worship,
and reignite our desire to serve you each and every day.
Glory, honour and praise be yours now and always,
Holy One, Holy Three,
One God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

**Merciful God,
our baptism proclaims the washing away of our sin
and the start of our new life in Christ. But we confess that we still live in sin.
We sin against you and one another, in what we do and in what we fail to do.
We excuse ourselves, and take comfort in familiar habits and traditions.
Forgive us when we mistake such comfort for the peace you offer us in Christ
Jesus. Prepare our hearts to embrace new ways of following him even as we
pray...** ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Second Sunday of Advent. December 5, 2021. Year C.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, proclaimed this hope:
"By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
giving light to those in darkness,
guiding our feet in the way of peace."
Receive God's tender mercy today.
Trust that God's peace will prevail
for all those who seek forgiveness in Jesus' name.

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Scripture Reading John 1:1-18, 9:5

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ') ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Waiting for Light

The other morning I got up and realized that at 7:50 am daylight had not yet started to break through. It didn't take long. By 8:30 it was full daylight, but I remember the "ugh" as I looked out the window to see our motion sensor light had come on due to movement of the neighbour's dog. There is a heaviness about darkness, especially when it is morning and it feels hard to get the day started. I would not do well as a shift worker! All the credit to them.

One needs to be careful when we speak about dark and light. There is absolute beauty in dark skin and black hair. I wear a lot of dark clothing because it seems I have a difficult time getting food from my plate to my mouth without some of it landing on me, so dark clothes it is, to hide how messy and clumsy I am.

And a night sky with stars that twinkle and sparkle have been the backdrop for many romances sparked and emboldened during an evening out. The night can and has captivated the imagination of poets, artists, and musician with all finding ways to create beauty. One of the most recognizable paintings in the world is Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. There is something about that night sky that attracts and resonates with people.

What one may not know about the painting is that in its beauty its history is that it was created at a time that Van Gogh had relapsed into a dark period in his life. He began to suffer hallucination and have thoughts of suicide as he plunged into depression.¹ And that is the side of darkness that is difficult – darkness that feels like the light is missing in our lives and in the world.

Reading the newspaper, listening to the news, or checking out a newsfeed, one can hardly comprehend how much darkness we have in the world. News reports people found dead on our streets, an opioid crisis, home takeovers, children slain in their

¹ <https://www.vangoghgallery.com/painting/starry-night.html>. Accessed December 3, 2021.

schools, governments and authorities continuing to struggle in the face of a global pandemic.

That is what's in the news, but we also have families and businesses in financial crisis, spousal and child abuse, homelessness, and suicide. Just last week I was speaking with someone who works with indigenous families and he spoke about the number of young people who commit suicide. We are talking teenagers whose deaths we never hear about in our local news. They have taken their own lives because they cannot see a way out of the darkness that surrounds them and their families. Hope illudes them. Darkness has drawn so tightly around them as to consume them. They can see no hope, no light.

I have spoken before about my own journey through depression, a time when I had three beautiful little children who smiled and laughed and played and I could not fully appreciate all that I had. Darkness in my soul and mind had made joy illusive, happiness the story of other people's lives. I am one of the fortunate ones who had family that recognized my plight and insisted that I get help. I also give thanks for medications, my doctor, my therapist, and prayer. It took all of this to get me well and whole again. With help darkness turned to light, joy, hope.

John's gospel has the line in this opening text that reads, "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." I confess, these first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John are some of my favorites in the Bible. It wasn't always that way. It had all seemed rather cryptic to me. I didn't understand that "the Word" that was in the beginning and that was with God and was God, was referring to Jesus. Jesus was "the Word" made flesh. Jesus was the Word that without him, not one thing came into being and "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

Jesus was light. Jesus is light.

We forgot how powerful light is. We are so used to flicking a switch and having light that we forget that it was not so for centuries. Light came from fire, whether a candle, a torch, or a lantern. Our experience of light in an instant is a very modern concept. Heck even our cell phones come with built in flashlights. There is rarely an occasion where we don't have access to light. And in this season of Christmas, we even get to experience an array of lights in shapes and colours that bring beauty into the evening.

Jesus came into the world when light was precious, took time, and did not illumine all things as the flames could not reach all the corners of a room. Jesus also came at a time when the Roman empire was ruthless in its expansion and authority. The Roman army struck fear into those who might come against its power and resources. When the writer of the Gospel of John talked about Jesus being light shinning in the darkness, it spoke volumes to those who heard it because of their lived experience.

The people of the First Testament or what we call the Old Testament had for decades longed for, had waited for a king that would rise up from the lineage of King David. This was their “make us great again” hope. Poetry and prose spoke to this hope. It would be a light in the darkness of their time to have the yearning fulfilled. Oppression had been their experience and it seemed to them that God had fallen silent. They were longing for power and control over their own way of being in the world. The people were longing for a light that would dispel the darkness of power and authority that ruled over them.

When Jesus stepped into ministry in what was likely his early thirties, many saw him as the fulfilment of the hope of Israel. A new king to overthrow the Romans and restore Israel to a former glory. They wanted him to step up and rule the world as they knew it and hoped for.

As they say, hindsight is 20/20, and after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, those who had followed Jesus began to understand his words and actions in a new way. They saw that their vision for Jesus’ rule had been limited by their narrow view of how the world and those who live in it might have rule and authority, but Jesus as the light of the world, came not just for a few, but that all might have life and have it abundantly.

Jesus’ life was a light for all people. I have to say, coming to write this service about light and as we light the candle of peace has not been easy after the conversation I had about the number of indigenous youth that feel completely hopeless and by an encounter in our parking lot at the church on Wednesday night. I came out of the church to find a very inebriated man falling, trying to stand, and failing over and over again. As I came close, I could see that his nose was bleeding and he was in crisis in many ways. I immediately called 911 and got him help, but not before watching him stumble across Brodie Street falling before a bus had to go around him. He was far too heavy and out of his senses for me to be able to manage him by myself so all I could do was wait helplessly. I waited for help, waited for the light of the ambulance to come and rescue him. I drove away from that moment thinking, “God, how in the world am I to preach your Good News when everything feels so dark, so bleak, particularly for some.”

I still don’t really know how to preach it, but as I reflect on my waiting to see the lights of the ambulance in the dark of the evening, coming to rescue the man, I think that Jesus coming into the world is something akin to that. We need rescuing from the powers of darkness in our world, in our minds, in our hearts, and in our homes. Jesus is that light. Jesus is that hope and just maybe, if we strive to live our lives in the spirit of Jesus we will experience Jesus light, but we will also be that light to others. Sometime the light is like a far-off star, sometimes it is as bright as a trouble light shining directly on us.

My hope for you, for our community, and for our world is that light will shine in the darkness, because the darkness cannot overcome the light of Jesus. It is up to us to

shine that light on the world, just as God continues to bring that light of Jesus in to the world, into each of us, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Amen.

Gift of Music

My Soul Cries Out with a Joyful Shout

Please join on versus 3 & 4

3. From the halls of power to the fortress tower
Not a stone will be left on stone
Let the king beware for your justice tears
Ev'ry tyrant from his throne
The hungry poor shall weep no more
For the food they can never earn
There are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed
For the world is about to turn
4. Though the nations rage from age to age
We remember who holds us fast
God's mercy must deliver us
From the conqueror's crushing grasp
This saving word that our forebears heard
Is the promise which holds us bound
'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God
Who is turning the world around

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Prayers of the People

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest.
Enter our lives today with your blessing.
We are lonely for you and the peace you bring.
Draw near to us in friendship and faithfulness,
so that in this season of celebration, we may know you are near,
and be filled with gratitude, even in the face of challenge and uncertainty.
Christ Jesus, coming among us,
Bring us peace.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guide.
Show us the way to wisdom and gratitude
in the face conspiracy theories and distrust.
We thank you for the kindness we know
in friends and good neighbours, in warm houses and warm smiles.
We pray for those who have lost their way in life
and feel like there is no place to turn.

Equip us to reach out to those who need your embrace and ours.
Christ Jesus, coming among us,
Bring us peace.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our hope.
Touch us with your healing and grace in every way we need these gifts.
We remember before you those we know and those known to you alone
who are living with loss or illness this season,
those who face depression or discouragement,
all who are worried about the impact of the pandemic,
and any who will find it hard to be merry this year.
(Keep silence for 30 seconds)

Shine the light of your comfort into their lives and ours.
Christ Jesus, coming among us,
Bring us peace.

Come, Christ Jesus, and rule in our lives.
Claim your rightful place in our hearts.
This world is struggling for the justice and mercy you bring.
We remember before you places marked by violence and upheaval,
and the devastating impacts of the climate crisis.
(Keep a brief silence)

Draw near to all leaders and citizens working for peace and justice.
Encourage honourable action and co-operation
in confronting global challenges and local needs.
Give hope to people under oppression
and those who live with fear or hunger day by day.
Hasten the day when the world's peoples will live as neighbours,
reconciled in your truth and freedom.
Christ Jesus, coming among us,
Bring us peace. Amen.

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Invitation to make an offering

We make our offering today as a sign of our commitment to Christ's reign of peace among us, trusting that our gifts will accomplish more than we might ever imagine, because God will bless them—and us.

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As we are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering to God this day to your church community.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information or to connect with me.

*Hymn

Arise, your light is come

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|---|---|
| 1. Arise, your light is come!
The Spirit's call obey;
show forth the glory of your God
which shines on you today. | 2. Arise, your light is come!
Fling wide the prison door;
proclaim the captive's liberty,
good tidings to the poor. |
| 3. Arise, your light is come!
All you in sorrow born,
bind up the broken-hearted ones
and comfort those who mourn. | 4. Arise, your light is come!
The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing,
God's power will make us strong. |

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Benediction

Peace be with you and with all whom you love.
Go now into God's world with God's peace in your hearts and lives.
Go in hope and peace.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3281/worship-connection-december-5-2021>

Example:

"Hallelujah," words and music by John Doe

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© Glen E. Rainsley. *Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions*. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P66-67.

¹ Copenhagen Martin B. *Feasting on the Word: Year A Volume 2 Lent through Eastertide*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P348, 350.

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