

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
3rd Sunday in Advent. Sunday, December 11, 2022

Words of Welcome

On this third Sunday of Advent, you want to prepare a candle or your advent candles in order to light them as part of the service. We begin...

Call to Worship

The light shines in the darkness,

We come to worship, seeking the joy Mary sang to welcome her saviour.

Source of light, shine into our lives and your world this Advent.

Renew in us the joy of our salvation.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 3rd Sunday in Advent. December 11, 2022. Year A.

Hymn

Prepare the way, O Zion

129

1. Prepare the way, O Zion: your Christ is drawing near!
Let every hill and valley a level way appear.
Greet One who comes in glory, foretold in sacred story.
Oh blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.
2. He brings God's rule, O Zion; Christ comes from heaven above.
His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth and love.
Lift high your praise resounding, for grace and joy abounding.
Oh blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.
3. Fling wide your gates, O Zion; your Saviour's rule embrace,
And tidings of salvation proclaim in every place.
All lands will bow rejoicing, their adoration voicing.
Oh blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.

"Prepare the way, O Zion," words by Charles P. Price, Frans Mikael Franzen,
© 1994 Selah Publishing Company, Inc.

Used By Permission. CCLI License #11276509 + Streaming License #21035127

Prayers of Adoration

Creator God, Maker of heaven and earth,
with the sea and the stars, and everything in between,
we praise you for the wonders of this world and beyond it.
You set all creation in relationships both fruitful and fragile.
You make deserts bloom and refresh the earth with seasonal rain.
With your care for the vulnerable in our hearts,
we praise you with joy song this day,
Our God, who is the Source, Saviour and Spirit of life,
perfect in unity, splendor and truth.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 3rd Sunday in Advent. December 11, 2022. Year A.

Prayer of Confession

Gracious Judge,
we look around us and we are not proud of what we see.
People criticize each other and listen only to those who agree with them.
We grumble and think the past holds the solutions,
forgetting its iniquities and inequities.
We are impatient for things to improve
but we do not want to change our ways.
Forgive us for sharing in the unhappy mood of our times,
and renew in us the joy and gratitude we once knew
for your gifts to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 3rd Sunday in Advent. December 11, 2022. Year A.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Receive the Good News in joy.
With great mercy, God forgives what we have confessed
and offers us new life in Christ.
Rejoice that you can make a new beginning
and share the joy in mercy and forgiveness with others.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 3rd Sunday in Advent. December 11, 2022. Year A.

Scripture Reading Romans 15:4-13

⁴For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written,

‘Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name’;

¹⁰and again he says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people’;

¹¹and again,

‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him’;

¹²and again Isaiah says,

‘The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.’

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

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

Message Hope, Peace, and Joy Together

I don't have a story to tell as I begin this time of reflection, but I have many names, faces, situations, and experiences that I recall as the words of scripture float in my head. This year has been a particular year of loss for the churches I work with. My circle of close friends who are struggling and grieving also breaks my heart. Many times the grief and loss that others are experiencing rekindles the grief that I have experienced and the losses I have felt, particularly that of my mother.

The numbers of people grieving the death of a loved one that are in my circle of knowledge alone are many. Then there are those who are yet facing death through illness, or even a long road of recovery from physical or mental illness, addiction, or broken relationships.

Grief it seems abounds.

Then there is the turmoil of our world. How often have you heard me speak about the injustices that people face, the wars, natural disasters, financial inequities, social stigmas, gender and cultural violence? Life is not sunshine and roses for pretty much anyone. You could sit down with a friend, family member, or stranger and learn of the cares, concerns, and sorrows they carry.

And then the Advent Season shows up as we prepare for Christmas with the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. How are we to claim any of this when things are not hopeful, peaceful, or joyful and love is limited to those who we appreciate, can relate to, and happen to love us back?

This is the paradox of Christmas.

On Friday morning an acquaintance and former professor of mine at Knox College posted her own story of grief. Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis wrote an article entitled, *The Other Side of Christmas...* that was posted on the website of the [Center for the Study of Bible and Violence](#). In the article she speaks about her own grief at Christmas time. Listen to her story,

My three-year-old son died on Thanksgiving Sunday in 2007. A few short weeks later, we encountered the Christmas season. A time of bustling merriment, hope and joy. I was not in the mood. It was so painful to sing the songs of Advent, including "Hope is a Star", which we sang at my son's funeral. It was painful to watch the children dressing as angels and shepherds, giggling and proud in their temporary new identities. There is a great deal of pressure at Christmastime to be joyful and merry, neither of which was possible for me. Worship was a time of silent torture, trying not to cry in public, churning with pain and unable to hear words of hope. What does joyful expectation look like when we are grieving? Can we find room within the nativity story for grief and trauma to find full expression? From the songs we sing at Christmas, we might

draw the conclusion that the biblical story of Jesus' birth was entirely joyful and peaceful. In reality, the whole story is suffused with trauma.¹

Advent and Christmas come to us with a young unmarried mother, a baby born in the messiness of a stable and without support of other women around. There is confusion and uncertainty for both Mary and Joseph. Then sometime later a jealous, fearful, and vengeance King Herod orders the slaughter of baby boys so that any possibly of his position being threatened down the road by some so called King can be put to rest.

Christmas of all times tells the story of fear, instability, loss, grief, and hopelessness. The Christmas story is one of trauma. Still, we sit here with the theme of hope, peace, and joy that have been the first three Sundays of Advent.

The scripture from Romans is one that speaks into all that is this time of year, from the merry and hope filled carols to the despair and says, that throughout the history of God's people there has been promise. Promise that God has always been with God's people, and in and through Christ, God has come close to humanity by being born, living the life of Jesus whose example was one of peace and hope, even joy. This incarnate God, come to us in Jesus as God with us, Emmanuel, this is where our hope comes from. It is where we find our peace. And where hope and peace are, there is trust. This trust comes from the promises of God born out in the lived experience of people witnessed and written about in both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament and in the lives of those whose faithful witness and teaching have been an example to us in our own time.

Celebrating the Advent themes of hope, peace, and joy does not negate the effects and challenges that comes with the struggles of life, what it gives is a promise that God is present in it all. Peace lives in tension with longing and fear. Hope lives in tension with hopelessness and pain. Joy lives in tension with injustice and grief. Faith grounds us in the promise that God is with us and so we can live all of this together. We do it in relationship with one another and with God.

In a world that is overflowing with pain, hardship, misunderstanding, the tug of the powerful, the prestigious, the rich and promise of riches, we are given the words, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (v13)

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, he was writing to a collection of house churches comprised of people who didn't see eye to eye. They had many differences and human reasons to judge one another. They were Jews and Gentiles. They were different and yet in Christ they had come together. Paul is writing about transformed relationships, human reconciliation, communities where people come to a place of hope, peace, joy, and love because of Christ's living and dying, Christ's resurrection and ascension.

¹ Travis, Sarah. [The other side of Christmas... – CSBV \(csbvbristol.org.uk\)](https://www.csbvbristol.org.uk). Accessed December 9, 2022.

The stories of Christmas and Easter are not two different stories, they are about one life lived to bring all things together in unity under God. Our God being one of restored relationships, reconciled lives and communities, a transformed world.

To be sure, we will not see the fullness of this in our time or in our lives, but the hope, peace, and joy of Advent point to the word that this is what we are called to. We are people called to reflect God's hope, peace, and joy into the world. This is done as we ourselves find healing and wholeness, as we work for the restoration and reconciliation of family, friends, and communities.

Let me share with you Sarah's words as she ends her article,

Christmas is a space in between sorrow and joy. There is room for profound grief, profound longing for a more just and abundant communal life. We are permitted to sit with our grief as long as we need. If we can't sing the songs, that is ok. Perhaps it is easier to sing when we see that the lyrics are loaded with grief. After all, we sing about hope because we are in an untenable situation. We sing about joy because we are longing for it. We sing about peace because there is no peace. We sing about love because we are afraid that we are not loved enough. Joy and pain intermingle in our celebration of Christmas. We are reminded that even in the darkest, most dreadful night, there is the hope of dawn. We are guided not by sun or moon but by a star, a pinprick of light that reminds us that even in the darkness, God shines.²

Hope, peace, and joy are together just as are fear, hopelessness, and grief. Through it all may Paul's words echo in our thoughts, responses, words, and feelings, and may you know joy because of God's Spirit at work in your life.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of all creation,
Every creature finds its way to rejoice in your presence.
The desert blooms, a mountain top glistens,
a stream makes music flowing over rocks.
We give you thanks for the joy in nature which can lift our hearts.
Thank you for the joy we can share with each other,
for familiar songs on our lips, for greetings from old friends,
for the excitement of children in this season,
and for the promise born again in us as we anticipate Jesus' birth.

God of the world, its wonders and its woes,
we know there are many people and places who cannot rejoice this year,

² Ibid.

so we open our concerns for the world before you this day.

We remember those who have been silenced
by oppressive regimes
by shocking tragedy
by bullying and threats
or by illness that takes away speech.

Help us listen with care when words are not easy to find,
and show us when and how to speak when others cannot.

We remember those who have grown weaker
Through months of isolation
Through changing economic circumstances
Through ageing or illness
Through hunger and homelessness.

Renew their strength and courage to engage life as they are able,
and show us when and how to offer our support and encouragement.

We remember those whose days are filled with fear
because of war and conflict on their streets,
because of intimidation and discrimination,
because the security they relied on has disappeared.

Bring them protection and comfort in uncertain situations,
and make us wise and generous neighbours who can offer relief.

We remember those whose lives seem empty
because their cupboards are bare while others shop for the season
because someone precious is absent
because choices made have not been fulfilling

Fill empty lives with meaning and purpose.
Show us how to share what we have in ways that are generous and dignified,
and let joy dawn again where it has died.

Renew in us all the joy that comes from the assurance of your love for us in Christ
Jesus as we gather our prayers in these words spoken as one voice...

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 3rd Sunday in Advent. December 11, 2022. Year A.

God of light, we thank you for the many gifts you have given us, and we pray today that you will teach us to be truly joyful. Help us remember that you supply our needs and fill our lives with meaning. Fill our days with keen awareness of your presence, and fill our hearts with praise as we celebrate this joyful Advent season. Amen.

© 2019 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188
www.hopepublishing.com 800-323-1049 All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

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.

Invitation to the offering

This Sunday we celebrate the Advent of Joy, rising in us through in Jesus Christ. Think of your gifts as seeds of that joy which we can plant in the world God loves for Christ's sake. ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 3rd Sunday in Advent. December 11, 2022. Year A. 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>

Hymn

Herald! Sound the note of judgement

117

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Herald, sound the note of judgment,
warning souls of right and wrong,
turning us from sin and sadness
till once more they sing the song.
Sound the trumpet! Tell the message:
Christ, the Savior King has come! | 2. Herald, sound the note of gladness!
Tell the news that Christ is here;
make a pathway through the desert
for the one who brings God near.
Sound the trumpet! Tell the message:
Christ, the Savior King has come! |
| 3. Herald, sound the note of pardon!
Those repenting are forgiven;
God receives us wayward children,
and to all new life is given.
Sound the trumpet! Tell the message:
Christ, the Savior King has come! | 4. Herald, sound the note of triumph!
Christ has come to share our life,
bringing God's own love and power,
granting victory in our strife.
Sound the trumpet! Tell the message:
Christ, the Savior King has come! |

"Herald! Sound the note of judgement," words by Moir A.J. Waters © the estate of Moir A.J. Waters
All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Benediction

Go with joy renewed this day,
energized to share that joy with justice and generosity
in the world God loves.

And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit
and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 3rd Sunday in Advent. December 11, 2022. Year A.