

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
2nd Sunday in Advent - December 10, 2023

Call to Worship

The day of the Lord brings grace and blessing.

We come to this day with hearts prepared for praising.

The day of the Lord brings judgment and pardon.

We come to this day with souls set on praying.

The day of the Lord brings wisdom and light.

We come to this day with minds eager to listen for God's will.

In our praising, praying, listening, and responding,
we come to worship God. [re:Worship: Advent Calls to Worship \(re-worship.blogspot.com\)](http://re-worship.blogspot.com)

Second Candle of Advent - Peace

Hymn

Long ago, prophets knew

121

1. Long ago, prophets knew
Christ would come, born a Jew,
come to make all things new,
bear his people's burden,
freely love and pardon.

2. God in time, God in man,
this is God's timeless plan:
he will come, as a man,
born himself of woman,
God divinely human.

Refrain

Refrain

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!
When he comes, when he comes,
who will make him welcome?*

3. Mary, hail! Though afraid,
she believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid
till the time expected,
nurtured and protected.

Refrain

4. Journey ends! Where afar
Bethlehem shines, like a star,
stable door stands ajar:
unborn Son of Mary,
Savior, do not tarry!

Refrain

Words: Fred Pratt Green © 1971 Hope Publishing Company
All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877
Music: public domain

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of purpose and promise,
you love the breadth and depth of your creation and care for us like shepherds tend
their sheep. You set pathways for us to follow, clearing the way in the wilderness of

the world. And yet we break your heart by wandering off, pursuing our own purposes. Still, you keep calling us back. You call us by name in our baptisms. You set us in the world to serve you, each one with a purpose you imagine for us. And so we come to worship you, O God, knowing that in you, we will find our true purpose, and the path you set will lead to peace and well-being in your deep love, revealed for us in Christ Jesus.

God of mercy,

We confess that we resist change, even when your Word compels us to reconsider our actions or opinions. We are set in our ways, and prefer to consider the changes others should make.

Forgive us.

By the power of your Holy Spirit, give us new eyes for seeing, new ears for hearing so that we follow Jesus more faithfully day by day.

God of grace, still our busy minds as we listen for your Word speaking through the Scripture. By your Spirit, create a space within us to receive your wisdom, your mercy, and your invitation to live for you. Amen.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Second Sunday in Advent. December 10, 2023. Year B.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, trust that peace and forgiveness are God's gift to you this day through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Receive the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and be at peace with God, with yourselves and with each other.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Second Sunday in Advent. December 10, 2023. Year B.

Scripture Reading Luke 1:39-45

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

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>

Message The Touch of Christmas

In the York Daily Record Melissa Nann Burke writes about Julie Malloy, a woman with a rare disorder that affects Julie's sense of touch and pain.

The pediatricians finally believed something was wrong the day 2-year-old Julie Malloy placed her hands on a hot wood stove and left them there. The toddler, with a head of pale blond hair, didn't flinch or jerk her hands away. She didn't

shriek. Her mother panicked. Jackie Stitt and other family members rushed to Julie's side, pulling her hands from the iron. The soft, red skin resembled slabs of raw meat.

At the hospital, Stitt tried, again, to tell the doctors something wasn't right with her daughter. Julie would bump herself, cut a finger accidentally or fall down and react with apathy. No whimpers, no tears. She seemed to have little instinct for self-preservation. "One Hanover pediatrician (had) said she just has a high tolerance to pain," Stitt recalled. It was more serious than that. Julie felt nothing.

Physicians ultimately diagnosed Julie...with a rare form of congenital insensitivity to pain. She has no sensation of touch, temperature, deep pressure or vibrations in her limbs and parts of her chest and back. She does have sensation in her head and portions of her trunk. Julie's motor nerves work correctly. She can move her arms and legs and turn her head at will.

The disorder is caused by a gene mutation that disrupts the development of sensory nerve fibers - those that carry sensations such as touch, pain, temperature to the brain. For Julie, the condition is as frustrating as it is isolating. Of all the senses, the sense of touch is what grounds us in our daily lives and connects us to our surroundings.

Julie doesn't know the prick of dewy grass beneath the feet, the confidence of a firm handshake or the warmth of a Saturday morning snuggled beneath the covers. Buttoning a shirt is impossible, typing is laborious, and walking requires attention to each step. She's literally out of touch with the world.¹

Can you imagine going through your life not being about to feel your skin? To be able to enjoy holding a child or a loved one? To feel the cool breeze on a hot day? Julie's experience talks about much of the real fear that comes from not being able to sense pain to protect one's self from harm, but there are all the little things that each day we get to experience because of our sense of touch.

Looking at the scripture reading, one of the beautiful moments in the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth is "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb." (v41). For parents spending those nine months waiting for a child to develop in the womb, a precious moment is when mom begins to feel the child moving around. It also hurts when the child decides to kick, but the joy of that movement which let's one know that life really growing is a cherished experience for mother and partner.

Elizabeth experienced the touch of the babe in her womb when Mary came to visit, that is shared with us, but we can know that Mary too felt her child over the course of those nine months of growth.

¹ Melissa Nann Burke. [Out of touch: A rare disorder affects woman's sense of touch, pain \(ydr.com\)](https://ydr.com/out-of-touch-a-rare-disorder-affects-woman-s-sense-of-touch-pain/). Accessed December 8, 2023.

Touch is so important to our well-being generally. It helps us feel connected, appreciated, loved. Touch can also be painful, hurtful, damaging. In this story we trust that what is being experienced is the loving presence of God through the movement of the Holy Spirit. We read that “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. (vv 41-44)

God’s Spirit, God’s promises came to two women who were the most unlikely of candidates for the job descriptions of mother of John and Baptist, a prophet of God, and Mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Mary a young woman, likely in her early teens, and Elizabeth an elderly woman long past her prime for child bearing. Mary, a yet to be married girl who could be stoned, and tossed aside for such an indiscretion as pregnancy before marriage, and Elizabeth a woman looked upon as unworthy because she was unable to provide a child for her husband.

These judgements seem harsh in our western culture given the independence and status woman have gained in recent history, but we must remember that it is recent history. Not long ago, women did not have rights, and certainly elsewhere in the world that is still a concern. In the time of Mary and Elziabeth, their worth would have been in their standing as married woman able to provide an heir for their husbands. They would have been considered more as possessions rather than valuable in their own right just because they lived and breathed.

It makes one wonder to whom Jesus might be born if God had sent him today. Would it be to a one of the homeless women in our encampments? We have this way of judging who has value based on their ability to provide for themselves and others. Not likely we would be looking for Jesus there. Yet throughout Jesus’ life we know that he had a special place for those who were marginalized and outcast.

We like to think that Jesus is clean-cut, well-manicured, looking like one of us and my hope and belief is that through the Holy Spirit Jesus is present to us now in this moment and each moment of our lives, touching our lives, bringing meaning and purpose to our lives. Still, given the Christmas story and the story of Jesus life and death, one cannot walk away without understanding that God is with those who seem unworthy, who appear to live unholy lives.

Recently I was introduced to a man on our fire escape at the church who asked me if I had a Bible that I could give him. There were actually two men that day that each received a small Bible with the New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs. For those of you old enough to remember the times when the Canadian Bible Society gave Bibles to children in elementary school, well that is the kind of Bible these two gentlemen received.

Since that time one of the men, who still frequents here has asked me to explain a passage to him as I was getting into my car to leave. On another occasion he shared part of his story with me and I have learned that he has cancer. He has also told me that he loves me, that I am an angel, and he has blessed me. I can tell you that each time I encounter him I feel like I need to pay attention because Jesus is with us. Jesus is with him; a person one might think is the least likely place for me to find the blessing of God. Yet every encounter I feel more and more that God is present.

In the coming days, consider how God has touched your life. Where have you seen and known God present with you or in another? Consider how God might be calling you to touch the lives of others in ways that share the hope, peace, joy, love, and compassionate justice of God in a world that so desperately needs to know that God is present.

To close, let me share the poem "The Touch of the Master's Hand" sometime called "The Old Violin" written in 1921 by Myra Brooks Welch.

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.

"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"

"A dollar, a dollar. Then two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three..." But no,
From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loosened strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet,
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice,
And going and gone," said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand.

What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:

"The touch of the Master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,

And battered and scarred with sin,

Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd

Much like the old violin.

A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,

A game — and he travels on.

He is "going" once, and "going" twice,

He's "going" and almost "gone."

But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd

Never can quite understand

The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought

By the touch of the Master's hand.²

May the touch of the Master's hand guide you as you live and move and have your being in the world. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God in whom we live and move and have our being:

As we gather our thoughts in prayer, we are aware of so many challenges —

in our own lives, in the lives of those we care about, and in the world around us.

We wonder how you will reveal yourself in response to so many different needs.

We trust that your heart is moved by the pain and potential in each precious life

for you never give up on situations which we find overwhelming...

And so we pray, God of healing,

Bring peace to the world you love.

We pray for those who are in the headlines this week,

for situations that concern us deeply,

and for all who cry out to you in the face of overwhelming odds:

Draw near to them with courage and wisdom

We pray for those who are suffering in quiet corners of our community, remembering

those who are ill;

those who are bereaved;

those who struggle with poverty or unemployment;

and all who face barriers through discrimination or disability:

Draw near to them with compassion and support

as we pray, God of healing,

Bring peace to the world you love.

² [The Touch of the Master's Hand by Myra Brooks Welch - Famous poems, famous poets. - All Poetry](#). Accessed December 8, 2023

We pray for those who are waiting for something significant –
for a birth or a death, for diagnosis or treatment,
for important news or a new opportunity:
Draw near to them in peace and faithfulness

We pray for those who struggle with their faith
and those who have given up on you because of actions
taken in your name that betrayed your love;

Draw them back to you in this season of wonder and love
as we pray, God of healing,

Bring peace to the world you love.

We pray for our church and for each other.

May our life together offer the healing peace of Christ in our community and in our homes. Open our hearts to new possibilities for ministry as we pray together the words Christ taught us

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Second Sunday in Advent. December 10, 2023. Year B.

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 in Advent celebrates God's gift of peace. When we look around the world, we see so many places where peace is missing, in neighborhoods and nations. But because we know the gift of God's peace, we can trust that our gifts will help restore true peace to souls and situations by the power of the Spirit.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Second Sunday in Advent. December 10, 2023. Year B.

Should you wish to support this ministry and/or 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

It came upon the midnight clear

148

1. It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"To all the earth good-will and peace,
from heaven's all-gracious King";
the world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

2. Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

3. But with the woes of sin and strife,
the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong,
but we, through din of war, hear not
the love-song which they bring.
Oh hush the noise, oh still the strife
and hear the angels sing.

4. And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! For glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
Oh rest beside the weary road
and hear the angels sing.

5. For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
God's promised splendours fling,
and all the world take up the song,
which now the angels sing.

Words and Music: Public Domain

Benediction

Go in peace this day, ready to bear fruit
worthy of your commitment to Jesus Christ
and his kingdom of justice and peace.

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

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Second Sunday in Advent. December 10, 2023. Year B.