

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay – Liturgy

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

3rd Sunday in Advent. December 17, 2023

Call to Worship

In worship, we remember that God is with us.

God is with us in joy and in sorrow.

In Jesus Christ, God reshapes our lives, past, present and future.

We wait with God for something new to emerge.

In this season, we await the birth of Jesus.

We wait in expectation, preparing to rejoice in Jesus' name.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Third Sunday in Advent. December 17, 2023. Year B

Lighting the Candle of Joy

Hymn

Hope is a star

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1. Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.

Refrain

When God is a child there's joy in our song.

*The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.*

2. Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.

Refrain

3. Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born.

Refrain

4. Love is a flame that burns in our heart.
Jesus has come and will never depart.

Refrain

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of Light and Love,

We rejoice in your presence this day,

for you look kindly on us, no matter how we came to be here.

You bring order from chaos, and call for justice for the vulnerable.

You turn weeping into laughter, promising life made new.

You redeem all that appears lost, giving each one a path and purpose.

And so we come to you in joy,

trusting you to bring peace and hope into these uncertain times.

Receive our worship this day
as we anticipate the difference your gifts will make to us
through Christ, your Son and our Saviour. Amen.

Generous God,

We confess that our concerns are narrow, focused mostly on our own lives.

Opportunities to say thanks or to offer encouragement slip by.

Anxiety turns us inward and anger can make us lash out.

Forgive us for neglecting the joy at the heart of the Advent season.

Turn our hearts back to you,

and inspire us with your love made flesh in Jesus Christ.

God of wisdom, shine the light of your truth on us as we listen for your Word, speaking in the Scriptures. Open our hearts to receive that Word which can change our minds, and our lives through the grace of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen

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Assurance of Forgiveness

In Jesus Christ, we are part of God's new creation. God's love makes all things new! Know that you are forgiven by this great love. Now find the courage to forgive one another in Jesus' name.

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Scripture Readings

❖ Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they

went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

❖ Matthew 2:1-18

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ 'A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

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Message The Sounds of Christmas

For some reason whenever I think of the sounds of Christmas it is carols and hymns that first come to mind. When I started writing this sermon it was the song Silver Bells that I thought of with the lyrics

City sidewalk, busy sidewalks
Dressed in holiday style
In the air there's a feeling of Christmas
Children laughing, people passing
Meeting smile after smile
And on every street corner you'll hear
Silver bells
Silver bells
It's Christmas time in the city
Ring-a-ling
Hear them ring
Soon it will be Christmas Day

Strings of streetlights, even stoplights
Blink of bright red and green
As the shoppers rush home with their treasures
Hear the snow crunch
See the kids bunch
This is Santa's big scene
And above all the bustle you'll hear
Silver bells
Silver bells
It's Christmas time in the city
Ring-a-ling, hear them ring
Soon it will be Christmas Day
Soon it will be Christmas Day

That song seems to describe for us all the sounds that we have come to associate with Christmas even if it is not exactly what each of us experiences for ourselves. The movies certainly make us believe that is what Christmas is supposed to sound like.

Many of these sounds would have been true to in the time of Jesus birth. There would have been many sounds of activity. Remember, the scripture tells us that this was at a time of a Roman census. Now there appears to be no evidence to suggest there actually was a census going on in this time period. On top of that, to propose that everyone go

back to register as ancestors of certain people from certain places would have been a logistical and procedural nightmare for the Romans. But what has been handed down to us is this story, and often there is somewhere in these stories a beginning, is that there were likely many people gathered for some reason and this has become part of the origin story of Jesus.

If there were many people gathered it would be like our shopping season here, and like our family gatherings over Christmas when people travel to be together, whether near or far. Some like, Ken and I, gather people together who, like ourselves, do not have family close by and so create a family for Christmas. The conversations and music, laughter and the busyness of preparing a meal, all of these things and more become part of the sounds of Christmas.

Amidst the sounds of the activity surrounding the birth of Jesus was also the sound of silence. While people were hustling and bustling there were places of stillness, a field where shepherds lay keeping their sheep, and a stable where a mother and father found shelter against the coolness of the night, protected from the elements. And though baby Jesus would have cried, many of us know the special moments of cradling a sleeping child in our arms and the absolute peace and stillness of those moments.

Then there are the sounds of joy. For many of us it is those things already mentioned, the music, the conversations, the laughter. At the birth of Jesus we are told that the stillness of the night was penetrated by the sounds of angels sharing the news of the birth of the Saviour. The news given to those most unlikely to receive it if brought against the standards of importance in which we have a tendency to rank people. Yet, the shepherds were the ones that God trusted to hear this news and to act upon it, to receive it. And they did receive it, they trembled in fear as any sane person would upon seeing such a sight, but they still accepted it and decided to go see if what had been spoken and sung to them could really have happened. The shepherds then shared their joy as they returned from their trek to the stable “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Christmas also holds the reality of sadness and suffering in the world. The story of what is called the Massacre of the Infants is playing itself out in front of our eyes each day as we see the war against Hamas in Gaza. The innocents that are being massacred is more than most of us can begin to imagine. I am not going to comment on the politics of this war or the war on Ukraine other than to say that God help us. We are watching children die, caught up in the adult decisions of who can become collateral damage. Our Prince of Peace Jesus must be crying just as the weeping for children happened in the time of Herod. Jesus nearly being one of those innocents had it not been for the fact his father got the family out of there and they became displaced people in Egypt.

Think about that a little when we judge those who are people displaced or refugees in our world because power has not cared for the needs of those more vulnerable. Jesus was displaced, a refugee in another land, and he is our Saviour, our Prince of Peace,

Emmanuel, God with us in our lives, but particularly in our suffering, as Jesus knew what suffering was all about, from childhood into adulthood, and to death on a cross.

If you are grieving this Christmas, grieving a death, the loss of income, the loss of friends or family, the loss of mobility, love, and life as you know it, you can trust that Jesus is there with you because Jesus knew suffering. He did not step away from suffering in life or death, and because of that we can trust that he does not step away from us, but walks with us.

This world is broken. It feels broken beyond repair, still God calls on each of us to live in ways that heal brokenness, our own and that of others. God's love is one of transformation. It is a pathway to healing and wholeness even when our lives and the world seem utterly and hopelessly drawn to despair.

As you celebrate this Christmas season, pay attention to the sounds that are around your and in our world. Hear the joy, the music, laughter and conversation. And choose to hear the grief, the tears, the sounds of war and pain in our world. May we be people who stand together to bring hope and healing into the world. The same hope that came with the birth of the Messiah, Jesus.

Don't despair that there is not much you can do, but rather do something. Reach out. Bring hope, peace, joy and love into a world desperate to know that these things are still possible. Be the people of God for yourselves, for family and friends, and for the sake of the world. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest,
and 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 which combines celebration in the face of uncertainty,
we may know your presence...
and say with all your people:

Come to us, Christ Jesus

And bring us joy.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guide,
and show us the way to wisdom and gratitude.
We are thankful for the kindness we know in friends and good neighbours,
in warm houses and warm smiles,
which hold off the darkness and fears for the future.
Encourage us to reach out to those who need your embrace and ours...
so that together we may sing of your presence:

Come to us, Christ Jesus

And bring us joy.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our hope
and touch us with your healing and grace.
We remember before you all those we know and those known to you alone
who are living with loss or illness this season,
those who face depression or discouragement,
and all who will find it hard to be merry this year.

Shine the light of your comfort into their lives...
as we speak of the hope that dawns in your love:

Come to us, Christ Jesus

And bring us joy.”

Come, Christ Jesus, be our king,
and claim your rightful place in our hearts.
Our world is struggling to find the justice and mercy you call for.
Draw near to our leaders and all citizens working for peace and justice,
and those striving to mediate or contain conflicts.
Encourage honourable action and co-operation on all sides.
Give hope to people under oppression
and to those living 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.

For the coming of this day we pray in the words Jesus taught us:

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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, the Advent theme is Joy. Scripture and song remind us to rejoice in Lord. Think of your offering as an opportunity to spread joy in God's world, even when the world seems uncertain. Rejoice in the Lord and give thankfully for Christ's sake.

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1. Oh come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant;
oh come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him, born the King of angels:

Refrain

Oh come, let us adore him; oh come, let us adore him;
oh come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

2. God of God, Light of light, born unto Mary,
the virgin blest, very God, begotten, not created:

Refrain

3. See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps:

Refrain

4. Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
"Glory to God in the highest!"

Refrain

Words and Music: public domain

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.

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