

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
First Sunday of Advent - December 3, 2023

Words of Welcome

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, a time for anticipating Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Christ. There are four candles and each has a theme. This Sunday the candle is the candle of hope. A fifth candle, the Christ Candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Day.

The scripture reading and the message for the service today are based in the Lord's supper. So I invite you to stop this video for a moment, if you so choose. Get a candle or maybe you have an Advent wreath, but also have some beverage...water, juice, wine, and something to represent bread. The symbols with you may help you step into the story and this time of worship. We begin with the call to worship.

Call to Worship

The nights are long and the days are short,
And so we wait for Jesus.

The heavens are trembling with anticipation,
And so we wait for Jesus.

Our redemption is drawing near,
And so we wait for Jesus.

Let us put our hope in God
as we prepare to welcome the birth of new life once more.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. First Sunday of Advent. December 3, 2023. Year B.

Light the First Candle of Advent: Hope

Hymn

Come, thou long-expected Jesus

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1. Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
2. Born thy people to deliver; born a child and yet a King;
born to reign in us forever; now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.

Words and Music: public domain

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Creator God,
You made the heavens and the earth.
You set the planets in their courses, lit the sun with fire,

caused the stars to shine and the world to turn.
Life springs up wherever your breath moves.
In Jesus Christ, you brought hope into a world full of fear and despair.
You sent your Spirit to enliven our hope and guide us on the way.
Now we wait in anxious times for the world to be made new.
Move in us and in all your creation to bring forth new life,
while we wait with hope in your grace and goodness.

Redeeming God,

**We confess that waiting is difficult when the world around us is on edge.
We are impatient with each other, waiting for someone to make a difference.
We are impatient with you, O God, waiting for a sign that things will improve.
Forgive us, O God. Turn our hearts to you again and again,
and show us how to act in hope for Jesus' sake.**

God of grace, you speak words of hope in the midst of anxious times. Send your Holy Spirit to open our ears to that hope. Give us wisdom to read our own times through the lens of your grace, and find comfort and courage through Christ, your Living Word. Amen

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Assurance of Pardon

Hear the Good News! There is nothing we have done, nothing we will ever do, that can separate us from the love of God made known in Jesus Christ. Take hope in this love, and live as forgiven and forgiving people.

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Scripture Reading Matthew 26:1-30

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ²'You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.'

³ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, ⁴and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. ⁵But they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'

⁶ Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. ⁸But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, 'Why this waste? ⁹For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.'¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. ¹¹For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. ¹³Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. ¹⁷ On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' ¹⁸He said, 'Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, "The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples." ' ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰ When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹and while they were eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.' ²²And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, 'Surely not I, Lord?' ²³He answered, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.' ²⁵Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so.'

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' ²⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

³⁰ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

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Message The Tastes of Christmas

Last Christmas we had what Ken and I have come to call our International Family Christmas. God had brought people into our lives from Nigeria, India, and Mozambique, all now living in Thunder Bay as Lakehead University students and the family of one of the students. Being their first Christmas in Canada, we planned a feast with the turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, gravy, salad, and green beans sautéed in butter, along with freshly made cranberry sauce. I had never made cranberry sauce before. I didn't even think I liked cranberry sauce, but figured we better get that in there to make it more traditional. Myself and one of the other guests made it together with joy and laughter. Neither of us knew what we were doing. We ate it warm as I hadn't read the directions carefully ahead of time to know you are actually supposed to chill it. Having said that, I discovered I like it warm.

Not only did we have what is known as traditional fare for Canada, we got to enjoy other dishes and desert as we had invited the guests to make or bring something that would make it feel more like Christmas for them. It was so good. The aroma of food in the oven as it cooked, the joy in the room as we played games and shared in conversation, the

anticipation of the meal, then enjoying what was familiar along with the sampling of new flavours and textures was wonderful.

The reason for gathering together was mostly to share in the meal, to taste and see the different dishes and variety of food that would warm our hearts and fill our stomachs. Hopefully as you have listened to my story you have been reminded of tastes you associate with Christmas.

This Advent we are going to explore the Christmas story through our senses of taste, touch, hearing, smell, and sight. So one might wonder why our reading today was not part of the Christmas story but rather from passages that we would normally hear at Easter. Truth is the Christmas story is not complete without the story of Jesus death and resurrection and it was in Jesus dying that we most fully experience the taste of Christmas. The communion table with bread and wine is the taste of why Jesus came in the first place. Jesus came out of love for us.

Around the world, in different cultures and different churches, the Lord's Supper is celebrated in various ways with different foods and traditions. Even here we have used different kinds of bread and have joined in communion by being served the bread and juice with people bringing it to those in the pews. We have had communion by intinction where a piece of bread is dipped into the chalice of juice and then partaken of. We have sat around tables and share the cup and bread. There is no one right way to do this.

You may have noted that I have even used different words to describe the sharing of bread and wine. The Worship Sourcebook describes the different ways we can understand communion.

Lord's Supper" conveys that Jesus himself is host of the supper and that we celebrate this feast in obedience to Christ. "Communion" highlights the intimate union we experience with both Christ and fellow believers. "Eucharist" [not a word that we use often in this church but still in important way to describe the meal is] (based on the Greek word for "thanksgiving") it names this feast as a meal of gratitude, just as the last supper was, for Jesus and his disciples, a meal of thanksgiving.¹

No one way is the only way to think about this meal. Each points us to and conveys an aspect of the meal that, taken together, broaden our experience and understanding of the deeper meaning of being invited to this meal in the first place and what it is to taste and see that the Lord is good.

Looking at this from the perspective of Advent and using the words of Mark Vande Zande the pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Orange City Iowa, who developed this

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particular worship series, “The tastes of the Lord’s Supper speak to the reason why Jesus came.”²

In the scripture we heard. “While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take eat; this is my body.” (Matt. 26:26 NRSV)

The taste of bread reminds us of

- the life of Jesus, who humbled himself to become a baby
- the incarnation – God becoming flesh
- Jesus’ humiliation – his suffering, the betrayal, the beating, the cross
- Jesus’ death³

Jesus went on and “he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to the disciples saying, “Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matt. 26:27-28)

The taste of juice or wine reminds us of

- the blood of Christ
- the sacrifice of Christ
- the drops of blood Jesus sweated in Gethsemane
- the beatings, floggings, nails, and crown of thorns that resulted in Christ’s bleeding
- the piercing of his side

Tasting the bread and juice when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper

- reminds us that our sins are forgiven (Matt. 26:28)
- unites us to Christ
- unite us together (1 Cor. 10:16-17)
- encourages us to proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes again (1 Cor. 11:26)⁴

This meal is at the center of our Christian faith. It is what we do as followers of Christ to be reminded that Jesus came because of love, out of love, and for love. It is a celebration of God’s grace and has nothing to do with our own goodness. It is about God’s goodness, grace, and faithfulness to us. It is about God’s work through the Holy Spirit in our lives. The meal is about relationship, it begins with God’s invitation to us then moves into a prayer of thanksgiving and hope. “It is deeply personal, but never private. It is a

² Mark Vande Zande serves as the pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa.

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³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

communal action of the gathered congregation, which represent the church in all times and places.”⁵

Today, when you taste the bread, the body of Christ’s love for you, and drink of the cup which is the blood of Christ’s love for you, savour its meaning and the impact that God’s love, grace, forgiveness, joy, and hope that is promised has had, is having, and will continue to have on the way you live your life. May you be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit as you taste and see that the Lord is good. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Merciful God,

We thank you for the light you shine into our lives as we wait on the coming of the Christ Child this year. The signs of our times are worrisome.

The earth itself groans in pain, and people have grown suspicious of each other.

As the days grow shorter and the nights, longer, comfort those who dread the short days and direct any who have lost their way. Wherever people feel overwhelmed by the demands of this season, let them catch a glimpse of your brilliance.

Generous God,

we remember that the days leading up to Christmas are difficult for many, year by year. We pray for those who are hungry and cold, stressed by rising costs all around. Alert us to ways that we can set a feast for those in our community and beyond whose cupboards are bare. Warm them with your love.

We pray for those who are grieving. Make us patient, compassionate companions to those in mourning, even when we’re not sure what to say. Fill sorrowing hearts with your comforting presence.

We pray for those who feel like the world is ending; for whose lives have been uprooted by fire, flood, or storm, and for those who worry about the future of the earth itself. Steady us amid the upheavals around us, and remind us that your steadfast love will see us through. Help us trust in you, no matter what is happening.

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And now we pray together, using the words that Jesus taught us:

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.

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Invitation to the Offering

The first Sunday in Advent celebrates God's gift of hope.
It is not easy to be hopeful in stressful times.
But God's steadfast presence gives us the courage to hope.
So we offer whatever we have to share,
knowing our gifts can spread hope in the world God loves
by touching lives in Jesus' name.

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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

Hark the herald angels sing

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1. Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King,
peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise;
join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King.
2. Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail the incarnate deity!
Pleased on earth with us to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King.
3. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail he son of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings,
Mild, he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise the lost of earth
born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King.

Words and Music: public domain

Benediction

Go in hope this day, and keep awake!
Watch for signs of God at work around you and within you.
Look for opportunities to serve others in Jesus' name.
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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