

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay**  
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent - December 1, 2024

**Words of Welcome**

Welcome to this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent.

**We Worship God**

**Call to Worship** (based on Isaiah 40: 1-11)

The God who speaks comfort to us calls us here.

**The God who addresses us with tenderness meets us here.**

The God who guides us with gentleness cares for us here.

**We come to prepare a way for the Lord.**

We come to ready ourselves for the transformation of our lives.

**For the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it.**

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**Lighting the Candle of Hope**

On this first Sunday of Advent, as we wrestle with many wants, we hear these words from Isaiah 40 (vv. 1-5):

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

“A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’”

We have many wants, but what we need is you, God. We need the light of Christ to come to us—to comfort and save us from our sin.

(The candle of hope is lit)

**Hymn**

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus*

**110**

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 by Charles Wesley.  
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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of love,  
you come to your people to dwell with us.  
You come with power to transform all things.  
You come with promises to make all things new.  
You come with signs of your deep love for the world.  
You come, and your truth breaks into our lives  
shattering lies and half-truths, setting your people free.  
Your coming is our hope, and so,  
we offer you our praise and prayers in gratitude and anticipation.  
Come into our lives again, O God,  
and show us how to hope in the face of all that is discouraging,  
for we gather in the name of Hope made flesh,  
Jesus Christ, your promise and our desire.  
Merciful God, in your gracious presence  
we confess our sins and the sins of this world.

**Surprising God,  
forgive our sleepiness in the presence of your splendour  
and for when we abandon hope  
and expect and look for the same old thing in the same old way.  
Forgive us our silence when we ought to have spoken up  
and our carelessness with your world and each other.  
Awaken us to your holy, hopeful presence  
so we may watch and wait for you, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. First Sunday in Advent. December 1, 2024. Year C.

## Assurance of Forgiveness

The One who comes with justice also comes with mercy.  
The God of Judgment is truly the Christ of compassion.  
God offers you forgiveness today, in the hope you will receive it gladly.  
Do not be afraid but rejoice in the God who comes to us.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. First Sunday in Advent. December 1, 2024. Year C.

## Scripture Readings

### ❖ Isaiah 40:1-8

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." <sup>6</sup>A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

### ❖ Matthew 20:20-28

<sup>20</sup>Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. <sup>21</sup>And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." <sup>22</sup>But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." <sup>23</sup>He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." <sup>24</sup>When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. <sup>25</sup>But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>26</sup>It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; <sup>28</sup>just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

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

### Reading (based on Isaiah 40:6)

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?  
All people are like grass."

My job is dissatisfying, and it doesn't even pay the bills.  
I long for something different.

We've been married for years now.  
When will we have a son or a daughter?

I'd really like a nicer car. My neighbor and my brother-in-law just bought brand-new ones. Why shouldn't I?

I've been sick for so long, I can't remember the last time I felt healthy. Will God ever heal me?

All people are like grass.

There is so much suffering and poverty in the world. When will God bring justice and peace?

We really need a larger home. Our kids have to share bedrooms, and there just isn't enough room when all their friends come over.

I don't have any friends at school—I sit alone every day at lunch. When will I have someone to hang out with?

My children are grown and have moved away. I long for the days when all my kids were home with me.

All people are like grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

### **Message We Want**

A long list of desires, of wants. Some of these things we think we need to be filled up or to be fulfilled. We often long for things that we think we need, but if we were to reflect deeply on these things would they be needs or wants?

In the scripture from Matthew the mother of James and John wants her sons to have seats of recognition and power along side Jesus. She comes to Jesus and Jesus asks her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, In your kingdom.' And Jesus responds, 'You do not know what you are asking.'"

What do you want? For some it is the necessities of life, food security and a home for safety. And there are things that we do desire that just make life more enjoyable and are true needs. It is not my intention to insinuate that needs and wants are a bad thing. But as we ponder this time of Advent, it may be the appropriate time to think about things more deeply than just want or need and take a look at what we long for.

In an article in Psychology Today, Dr. Andy Tix writes about longing for an experience. He shares...

One particular fishing memory stands out from this past summer. I woke up early to hike to a new location. I made my way downstream until I found the most lovely spot where trout were rising all around! I was all alone—surrounded by lush hills—as I tried to apply all I had learned from a summer of practice. After catching a few fish, the sunshine broke through the clouds and landed on my shoulders. The

combination of the warmth of the sun and the coolness of the meandering river on my legs made me pause. I looked up and saw a bald eagle fly overhead. My heart filled with gratitude.

Eventually—and unfortunately—I needed to leave. As I walked upstream, I twisted my knee on a rock and tore my meniscus. I have often imagined being back in that scene—feeling the sun on my shoulders as I felt the river move around me - but I have not been able to return yet. Even when my knee heals, I'm not sure this same experience can be recaptured.

As I reflect on this story, I wonder why fly fishing captivated my interest for so long, why that particular day in the sunlight resonated with me so much, and what it is exactly I yearn for now. What I have concluded is that there is a part of me that longs for a connection with awe-inspiring beauty, and that this is a core aspect of my personality, for good and for bad.<sup>1</sup>

As we begin this time of Advent, a time of waiting, what are we really longing for? Maybe you long for a healing and restoring of a relationship.

Another word for longing may be better understood as yearning. We yearn for someone or something...maybe a memory of something long past...the touch of a partner, a phone call to one's mother to share news only to remember that her presence is in heaven and not on earth. Maybe it is the comfort of a pet now gone. Maybe these examples stirred in you a memory of a longing or yearning.

The words from Isaiah chapter 40 are written to people in exile...a people yearning for some semblance of what life used to be like. They have felt abandoned by God. They are far from their homeland from which they were taken captive and led away. Their king, kingdom, and temple all gone. They were longing to know God with them again and longing to return home. Longing for what was, likely knowing that things would never be the same again. Yet it is here that God shows up with a word of comfort and a word of hope, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. <sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Things will never be the same for the people who come back to the land after being exiled for hundreds of years, but God will take their wants, their longings, their yearnings and restore and shape the people through their relationship with God. And when God

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<sup>1</sup> Tix. Dr. Andy. [Longing for More | Psychology Today](#) Accessed November 29, 2024.

does the shaping, the restoring, it is always in ways that we can not imagine or comprehend and rarely anticipate.

When you consider your own longings today, what sits most deeply on your heart? When you long for more, what is it that you are longing for more of? It is very human to long for more. Yet, I wonder if what we long for is something that was instilled in us from the time of our birth...a longing for God. A longing for relationship with God that sustains our living, that brings the hope, peace, joy, and love that we really lean into at Advent. And the extension of that being a longing for relationships of hope, peace, joy, and love with family, friends, in community, and even globally.

One of my favorite pieces and one that was deeply touching that the Thunder Bay Community Choir sang was *There is a Yearning*. I couldn't sing it without being moved to tears. It tugged at something deep in me. Let me share the poem by Susan Bentall Boersma, that was set to music at the risk that without the sound of seventy plus voices singing it may not have the same impact. Still, the words are stunning.

### THE YEARNING

There is a yearning  
in hearts weighed down by ancient grief and centuries of sorrow.

There is a yearning in hearts that in the darkness hide and in the shades of death  
abide, a yearning for tomorrow.

There is a yearning, a yearning for the promised One,  
the Firstborn of creation.

There is a yearning for the Lord who visited His own,  
and by His death for sin atoned, to bring to us salvation.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel within our hearts, the yearning.

There is a yearning  
that fills the hearts of those who wait the day of His appearing.

There is a yearning when all our sorrows are erased and we shall see the One who  
placed within our hearts the yearning.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel within our hearts, the yearning.

In this season of Advent may we look deeply at our longing for more and seek to find it's home with God the Father, experience it in the Christ Child, and through the Holy Spirit stirring in our hearts, minds, and bodies. This is Advent, the time of waiting, the time of yearning, a time for longing to experience more of God with us.

### Prayers of the People

O Spirit of Hope,  
when the world is confusing and bleak,  
you pierce the despair with your Word,

and renew our vision of God's possibilities for our lives.  
Thank you for lessons learned, for changes of heart and mind,  
and for new discoveries made and hope restored.  
As the seasons turn to winter,  
we pray for those who feel the burden of loneliness and isolation.  
We remember those without homes to shelter in,  
and those forced to leave their homes  
through conflict, natural disaster or political upheaval.  
*(Keep a brief time of silence)*

Spirit of Hope, shelter all these under your wings.

O God of Peace,  
the world and our relationships, homes and workplaces  
are too much filled with conflict, strife and disagreement.  
We pray for places where hurt feelings, violence and cruelty appear to win the day,  
thinking especially of nations in conflict around the globe  
and situations closer to home that we carry on our hearts.  
*(Keep a brief time of silence)*

God of Peace, work for just and peaceful resolutions to prevail.

O Creator of Joy,  
we thank you for moments of joy and celebration in our lives,  
for pleasure given and received, for quiet times of reflection and conversation,  
and for the many ways that allow us to keep in contact with those we love.  
We remember those who feel bitter while others rejoice,  
those who grieve the loss of loved ones,  
and those who face a bleak winter for any reason.  
*(Keep a brief time of silence)*

Creator of Joy, bring to your people warmth and lightness in the season ahead,  
and let your joy shine through us as compassionate companions.

O Love divine made flesh in Christ,  
you call us into communion with you and community with one another.  
We pray for your church and this congregation,  
that love will guide all your people as we plan for our life and mission.  
And we remember before you our families, whether we are close or estranged;  
and our friends and colleagues who furnish our lives with love.  
*(Keep a brief time of silence)*

Love Divine, bless each one with your love  
and help us express our gratitude and concern for each other in word and action.

And now we join our prayers into one voice and pray in the words Jesus taught us to say:

## 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

We make our offering today with hopeful hearts, trusting that the Holy One who comes to us will bless our gifts and our lives, to make us signs of hope in the world God loves.

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St. Andrew's uses the donations that we receive to support the ministry of God from this church and in community. Your gifts make a difference and this includes the ministry of online worship as well. If you are able to make a one-time donation or support this ministry on an ongoing basis your gift makes an impact. Please check us out at [standrewpres-tbay.ca](http://standrewpres-tbay.ca). There you can find various ways of giving from e-transfer to the online donate button that allows you to give by credit card. We are deeply grateful for your generosity.

## Hymn

*Prepare the way, O Zion*

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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 tiding 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 Frans Mikael Franzen, alt. Charles P. Price.  
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## Benediction

Beloved, go from this place blessed  
with a hope that takes root and grows,  
preparing us to notice, listen,  
and join in with God's kingdom work among us. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, June 2024.  
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