

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

3rd Sunday of Advent – December 14, 2025

Responsive Call to Worship/Lighting the Advent Candle

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.

Light three Advent candles

***Hymn**

All earth is waiting

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

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.
As you care for the vulnerable and all your people,
we praise with joyful songs in our hearts this day,
Our God, who is the Source, Saviour and Spirit of life,
perfect in unity, splendour and truth.

**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 inequities and iniquities.
We are impatient for things to improve but we do not want to change our ways.
Forgive us for sharing in the ungrateful mood of our times,
and renew in us the joy and gratitude we once knew
for your gifts to us in Christ Jesus.**

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.

Prayer for Understanding

God of whispers and shouts, you proclaim the good news of joy from all corners of creation. As we turn to our scriptures, may the words inspire us to dream of a world where joy thrives among us. Amen.

Scripture Reading Luke 1:39-55 Blessed Among Women

³⁹⁻⁴⁵ Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, straight to Zachariah's house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sang out exuberantly,

You're so blessed among women, and the babe in your womb, also blessed!
And why am I so blessed that the mother of my Lord visits me?
The moment the sound of your greeting entered my ears,
The babe in my womb skipped like a lamb for sheer joy.
Blessed woman, who believed what God said,
believed every word would come true!

⁴⁶⁻⁵⁵ And Mary said,

I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

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Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Unexpected Joy

A couple of questions...

How is it for you to feel joy? And in a world that is filled with struggle, do you grapple with joy?

Some of you are dealing with chronic pain, loss of mobility, the loss of independence, the loss of loved ones, the challenges of aging. Some may be dealing with the challenges of being away from family, or a bully at school or the workplace. Maybe the environment you live or work in, the people around you, are critical, judgemental, maybe even cruel, and you have a difficult time navigating the relationships.

In other things we grapple with joy when we look at the world and think, "How can allow myself to feel joy when everything in the news is so terrible?" I have had it myself where I think, how can I allow myself to feel joy when there is so much suffering. I think of children...families...around the globe, Palestine, Ukraine, and so many places we do not hear about regularly like Myanmar, and wonder how can I deserve to feel happiness when children are starving, orphaned or parents are holding their dead children in their arms crying from their depths over the loss.

And really, we don't even need to go that far from home. We look south of the border and hear of the families being torn apart by the ICE raids. In our own communities, a concern across Canada, is the challenges of homelessness. As the temperatures turn frigid, I can't even imagine what it is like to be living outdoors. And we all know that the demands on Food Banks have increased dramatically over the last number of years, meaning that families are at risk.

I cannot count the number of times I have driven away from the church in my warm car, to go to my warm home with plenty of food and a cozy bed, and thought, this is just not fair. I don't want to feel guilty and no one should be suffering. And yet all I can do is pray, drive away, and wonder.

And yet the story of Mary and Elizabeth tells us something different. Here were two women who knew hardship, poverty, and oppression because of their gender, and oppression because of government, and they chose to rejoice. They knew that God was at work. They didn't know all of what that would look like but they knew that somehow their children would make a difference. We know that their lives didn't change in terms of status or wealth, but they still chose hope and joy as a response to what was going on in their worlds and to themselves personally.

It is interesting to note that Elizabeth called Mary blessed, and many to this day call Mary blessed. Mary herself did not use those words. Mary was humbled because God chose to align God's self with one who was lowly in power and in nature. She had no

status what so ever. And yet, this is where God chose to begin this story of the Messiah come to earth. God with us.

God chooses the most unlikely of people and places to inspire blessing, change, and justice. And maybe that is because it is people who are struggling, who are suffering, it is those people who can truly imagine something different. It is those who are oppressed that know what it means to dream for something different. It is the powerless that dream for justice, joy, hope, and more. That is God's way as well. It is not that God does not use those who are in power to do good, but those who struggle know what it means to want for something different and often want that something for others as well, not just for themselves.

I have watched as those who have nothing share with others from what they themselves have. They walk together, help one another when times are tough. Yes, there is harm, but there is also compassion. Those who suffer understand the suffering of others.

Going back to the story of Mary and Elizabeth, these women knew their struggle, but also lived it with and among others, yet here they are speaking words of hope, strength, power, and with joy.

Today being the third Sunday of Advent, we have lit the candle of joy as we heard the story of these two pregnant women, one a mere teenager, the other a woman past what should have been her years of being able to bear a child.

And yet in the midst of what life was for them, they expressed joy. Joy in the face of hardship, oppression, and fear. They seem to know and understand on some level what God was up to with this child Mary is going to deliver, and that through this child God will act. We hear Mary saying...

He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

Mary's song, as it is known, talks about the struggle and strife of the world and how God was, is, and will act to change things. God chose the most vulnerable in which to bring

about the changes that would come in how the world would know God, be in relationship with God, and with one another, through the lived experience of Jesus as God with us. Dwelling among us. Showing us how to live in ways that lift up the powerless, engage justice, and allows for hope, peace, joy, and love to flourish.

Today if you are struggling with joy, remember Mary and Elizabeth. Choose to work for change in the world. Lift someone else up. As a church, let's find ways to lift up those who are most vulnerable in our community. If you can't begin to find joy in yourself or you wonder how one can feel joy when the world is so full of hate, injustice, and harm, know that joy is a form of activism. Joy matters.

If we don't have joy, how can we fight for it? We fight for that which is in our own hearts. As Brene Brown writes, "Stopping and accessing joy and accessing gratitude is what reminds us what we're fighting for, it reminds us what we want for the rest of the world."¹

If you really need to bolster the joy in your own heart begin with finding things to be grateful for each day. Make it a practice. If you can, start journalling it. If you wonder what you are grateful for, scroll through the photos on your phone for the last year. We tend to take pictures of things that bring us joy.

Practice joy and being joyful. Joy is contagious, joy is hopeful, joy is life changing. Even bringing a smile to someone who is having a bad day, speaking kind words, can change how a person walks through the rest of that day. Joy for us means that we can fight for joy for others. Joy is an act of resistance against power that wants to frighten, control, and oppress.

Don't contain your joy. Share it. Fight for it for yourself and others. Joy can change the world. In the words of that famous hymn...Joy to the world the Lord is come, let earth receive her king!

Today, may you walk in joy. Share it. Claim it. Live in it.

May the peace of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the love of God shine through you into the world, speaking against the power that would keep us down. And may joy ring out because of you, me, and all of us who desire that joy be the lived experience for the world. 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,

¹ [Accessing Joy and Finding Connection in the Midst of Struggle - Brené Brown](#). Accessed December 14, 2025.

a stream makes music flowing over rocks.
We give you thanks for the joy in nature that 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 who makes all things new, **renew our life together.**

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

God who makes all things new, **renew our life together.**

We remember those who have grown weaker
through changing economic circumstances,
through aging or illness, through fear or loss,
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.

God who makes all things new, **renew our life together.**

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.

God who makes all things new, **renew our life together.**

We remember those whose lives seem empty
because their cupboards are bare,
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.

God who makes all things new, **renew our life together.**

Renew in us all the joy that comes from the assurance of your love for us in Christ Jesus for we gather our prayers together in the words he 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

Invitation to the offering

This Sunday, we celebrate the Advent of Joy, rising in us through Jesus Christ. Think of your gifts as seeds of that joy which we can plant in the world God loves for Christ's sake.

There are various ways that people give to this congregation for our work as God's people, through signing up for a monthly donation, or sending an etransfer.

Check out the opportunities to support St. Andrew's ministry at our website, [St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay, ON – Part of the PCCWeb network of churches](#)

***Hymn**

Good Christians, all rejoice

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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.