

We Gather – December 17, 2023

Advent 3: We allow ourselves to be amazed

Please take and read a copy of the announcement page.

Prelude

Recognition of Territory

As we begin this time of worship, we remember that we are situated on the traditional lands of the Onkwehonwe. We acknowledge and give thanks for the enduring presence of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people on this land. We are committed to moving forward in the spirit of reconciliation and respect.

Introit

When the King Shall Come Again
(CP 109)

Advent candle lighting

How does a weary world practice joy?
BY DANCING AND THROWING BIRTHDAY PARTIES.

By hanging Christmas lights, and holding sleepy babies.
By singing loudly, and looking for good news.
BY TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS AND SHOWING UP FOR OUR COMMUNITY.

There are a million ways to practice joy.
So today we light the candle of joy as a reminder and a charge.
WITH GOD'S HELP, MAY WE BRING JOY INTO A WEARY WORLD. AMEN.

Candle Lighting Hymn

Light a candle a symbol of joy,
Light a candle, let all earth rejoice,
Light a candle to shine in the dark,
Light a candle, open your heart.
Light a candle, and open your heart.

Text and Music by: Terry Macham 2014

CALL TO WORSHIP

Our God can part the sea.
GOD CAN BRING WATER FROM A ROCK,
AND PROVIDE BREAD IN THE DESERT.

Our God can walk on water.

GOD CAN HEAL THE SICK,
AND TURN THE WATER INTO WINE.

Our God sets the stars in the sky.
GOD HEARS OUR VOICE WHEN WE CRY,
AND IS CLOSER THAN OUR OWN BREATH.

There is nothing our God cannot do.
LET US STAND IN AWE.
LET US WORSHIP GOD WITH WONDER.

Vision and Mission
(spoken softly together)

We are partners, participants in the work of God.
TOGETHER, WE ARE COMMITTED
TO HELPING BUILD A CITY
WHERE NO ONE JOURNEYS ALONE.

(Adapted from Isaiah 49.6)

Opening Prayer

Holy God,
You know our names
You count the hairs on our heads,
You carry the dreams of our hearts.
Your fingerprints are all over creation
You speak to us in a million different ways.
We turn to you in worship this day
with our senses ready to perceive you,
with hearts wide open,
with grateful spirits.
Meet us here.
Bring us joy, so that we too,
can be beacons of joy in a weary world.
Amen

Hymn VU 2 - Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus

1/4 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.

2/4 Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

3/4 Born thy people to deliver;
born a child and yet a king;
born to reign in us for ever;
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

4/4 By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

words: Charles Wesley 1744
music: Psalmodia Sacra 1715
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Prayer of Confession

HOLY GOD,
SOMEWHERE IN OUR CHILDHOOD
WE FACE PRESSURE TO OUTGROW AWE.
WE TURN INTO ADULTS WHO OBSESS OVER DATA AND FACTS.
WE PRAISE THOSE WHO HAVE ANSWERS,
AND ASSUME THAT WONDER IS AN ANSWERLESS GAME.
FORGIVE US FOR CLOSING THAT DOOR TO YOU.
REMINDE US THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO CHILDREN.
TEACH US THE WAYS OF AWE AND WONDER,
SO THAT LIKE ZECHARIAH,
WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES SPEECHLESS,
OUR FIRST WORDS WILL BE WORDS OF PRAISE.
WITH HEARTS OPEN WIDE WE PRAY, AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Family of faith,
Just as we marvel at mountains and newborns,
at sunrises and sunsets,
God marvels at us.

There is nothing you could do or leave undone that could prevent God from loving you.

So hear and believe the good news of the gospel:
WE ARE FORGIVEN.
WE ARE LOVED.
WE BELONG TO GOD. AMEN.

Hymn MV 158 Dream a Dream (vs 1-2)

Dream a dream, a hopeful dream,
as children do on Christmas Eve,
imaginings, surprising things
to hold and to believe.

Dream a time, this Christmas time,
when no one's hungry or afraid;
that weapons go and harvests grow,
that friends are met and made.

Time for the Young at Heart

Hymn MV 158 Dream a Dream (vs 3-4)

Dream a peace, our planet's peace,
the greening of the earth at play,
the holy ground where life is found,
where God has touched the clay.

Dream a gift, the Christmas gift
that changes every thing we see:
the shimmering of angel wing,
the Child, the Mystery.

Prayer for Illumination

words: Shirley Erena Murray, 1996

music: Ron Klusmeier, 2005

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Prayer for Illumination

God of the universe,
Make our hearts porous.
Open our eyes, as if for the first time,
so that we might see your world
with awe and wonder once again.
We often approach scripture with an analytical lens,
intellectualizing the stories heard,
bringing historical context
and textual criticism to the table.
For just a moment,
pause those instincts to make room for wonder.
Help us to greet this text with awe and gratitude
before we begin dissecting it for truth.
For I am confident, that in doing so,
we will not only find you in the hallways of our thoughts,
but in the pathways of our hearts.
With gratitude we pray:
Keep us open.
Amen

Focus Lesson: Psalm 126 (VU 850 refrain 1)

R WE'LL SING THE SONG OF JOY,
WE'LL SING THE SONG OF JOY!

When God brought Zion's captives home,
it seemed to us like a dream.

BUT THEN OUR MOUTHS WERE FULL OF LAUGHTER,
AND OUR TONGUES UTTERED SHOUTS OF JOY.

Then they said among the nations:

'God has done great things for them.'

TRULY GOD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US,
AND THEREFORE WE REJOICE.

R WE'LL SING THE SONG OF JOY,
WE'LL SING THE SONG OF JOY!

Restore our fortunes, O God,
as streams refresh the Negev.

THOSE WHO SOW IN TEARS SHALL REAP WITH SHOUTS OF JOY.

Those who go out weeping, carrying seed for sowing,

SHALL COME HOME WITH SONGS OF JOY,
BRINGING IN THEIR SHEAVES.

R WE'LL SING THE SONG OF JOY,
WE'LL SING THE SONG OF JOY!

Focus Lesson: Luke 1:57-66

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, 'No; he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'None of your relatives has this name.' Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Response to Scripture

May our sacred story help us, as Knox-St. Paul's United Church, to hear God's continuing call to us:

I'M SETTING YOU UP IN PUBLIC MINISTRY,

SO THAT MY PRESENCE, THROUGH YOU,
BECOMES KNOWN
TO ALL WHO JOURNEY ALONE!

[Adapted from Isaiah 49:6]

Reflection
Rev. Erin McIntyre

Hymn: God Rest you Merry

1 God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay!
Remember Christ will bring love's light
The dawn of Christmas day.
To lead us all from woe and win
When we have gone astray

R O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy!

2 God rest you also, women,
Who by men have been erased,
Through history ignored and scorned,
Defiled and displaced;
Remember that your stories too,
Are held within God's grace.

R O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy!

3 God rest you, queer and questioning,
Your anxious hearts be still,
Believe that you are deeply known
And part of God's good will
For all to live as one in peace:
The global dream fulfilled.

R O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy!

4 God rest your mind, O humankind,
Let strife and conflict cease.
Remember love is active here,
And only to increase,
To carry us to well-springs of
God's joyous hope and peace.

R O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy!

Text: v. 1 Traditional, alt 2019
v. 2-4 Jeffrey Wilsor 2019
Music: Traditional English Carol
Free for public use.

Faith Sharing

Prayer of Dedication

Holy God,
We commit ourselves to living lives of awe, wonder, and gratitude,
trusting these things will help us to share your joy with the world around us.
Bless the resources, energy, and effort we offer,
that in carving out moments of awe and wonder,
and in sharing joy,
we might truly build a city where no one journeys alone.
Amen

Anthem

O Come, Divine Messiah
(CP 95)

Prayers of the People

Prayer of Jesus

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN
HALLOWED BE THY NAME,
THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE.
ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD,
AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES
AS WE FORGIVE THOSE
WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US
AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL;
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER
AND THE GLORY
FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.

Hymn Isn't It Amazing

- 1 Seeds within the soil grow
Deep under the ground below
Planted when the earth was bare
No life showing anywhere
- R Gloria! Isn't amazing?
Gloria! Isn't amazing?
- 2 Deeper, deeper grow the roots
Reaching upward grow the shoots
Through the earth they weave and snake
Until soil starts to break
- R Gloria! Isn't amazing?
Gloria! Isn't amazing?
- 3 Cell by cell a plant is built
Toward the sun the leaves will tilt
Nourished by the sun and rain
To bring forth its seed and grain
- R Gloria! Isn't amazing?
Gloria! Isn't amazing?
- 4 Even when the earth seems bare
Plant the seeds of hope with care
If you water in the drought
You will reap with joyous shout
- R Gloria! Isn't amazing?
Gloria! Isn't amazing?

Text: Anna Strickland 2023

Music: Traditional French Carol, arr. Edward S. Barnes 1937
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Benediction

Choral Response: VU 974 Amen
Amen! Amen! Hallelujah amen!
Amen! Amen! Hallelujah amen!
Amen! Amen! Hallelujah amen!

Postlude