



Birchcliff Bluffs United Church

Ministers: All the People – wherever and however they gather

Minister of Word & Sacrament: Rev. Dr. Ellen Redcliffe

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December 17, 2023

Advent Three

WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE

Prelude

Lighting the Christ Candle

First & second candles are lit

On this third Sunday of Advent, we light this candle symbolizing joy-acknowledging the reality that joy often bursts out of pain, hardship, and failure.

The third candle is lit.

Joy often comes to us unexpected, especially when we have given up on life. Joy reminds us that nothing is impossible-even in weakness. In our joy we are powerfully reminded that GOD is always near.

Therefore, let us rejoice! Let us sing as we celebrate the good news in this divinely newborn baby.

Hope Is a Star (v. 3)

VU 7

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

Our joy erupts from the assurance that GOD is with us in our here and now.

Let us join prayerfully in thanksgiving and through divine conversation to discover peace and strength for our living and our loving:

Open our understanding, O God, rooted in coming home to your loving. Free our perceptions from the chains of judgement and of polarization. Equip us to perceive the good in one another while sharing right relations. Inspire us for new life and

**new vision in all we think, and do, that we might dance joyfully in Jesus' name.
Amen.**

Land Acknowledgement

We now take a moment to acknowledge the sacred land beside the water on which Birchcliff Bluffs United Church stands. It has been a site of human activity for many thousands of years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently the Mississauga's of the Credit and Scugog, all part of the Williams Treaty. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work on this territory and we seek to be mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.

Opening Hymn

My Soul Cries Out

MV 120

1 My soul cries out with a joyful shout
that the God of my heart is great,
and my spirit sings of the wondrous things
that you bring to the ones who wait.
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,
and my weakness you did not spurn,
so from east to west shall my name be blest.
Could the world be about to turn?

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn!

2 Though I am small, my God, my all,
you work great things in me,
and your mercy will last from the depths of the past
to the end of the age to be.
Your very name puts the proud to shames,
and to those who would for you yearn,
you will show your might, put the strong to flight,
for the world is about to turn.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn!

3 From the halls of power to the fortress tower,
not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware for your justice tears,

ev'ry tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor shall weep no more,
for the food they can never earn;
there are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed,
for the world is about to turn.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,
and the world is about to turn!

Call to Worship

During the Advent-Christmas season, we can feel so far away from GOD. We can feel distanced from the very reason Jesus was born into this world.

The emptiness could be likened to the depth of the night sky before GOD placed the moon or stars. When these lights came into existence, the sky was suddenly multi-dimensional, ablaze with light and hope.

With the salvation offered through Christ's birth, that same hope-filled peace bursts into our lives with the singing of the heavenly hosts filling the skies.

It is reflected through us and beckons others to come closer and experience what we know in the baby born in Bethlehem.

Life and Work

Opening Prayer

We joyfully gather this day, O GOD, in thanksgiving for what this time of year means to us.

The ornaments on the tree, the lights on our houses, all celebrate the coming light of Christ in the depths of winter. Through your grace, help us to overcome the feelings of stress or despair we may experience in this season. May our feasting and merriment and the gifts given to family and friends, be an expression of joy in the most wonderful time of the year. Be with us as we worship, that our lives might be transformed with joy by Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

Scripture **Psalm 126** A Harvest of Joy

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

² **Then our mouth was filled with laughter
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."**

³The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

**⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.**

⁵May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

**⁶Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.**

John 1:6-8, 19-28 The Word Became Flesh

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²²Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, “Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.” ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn

A Light is Gleaming

VU 82

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms
throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love
is burning bright, living in the light.

1 When light comes pouring into the darkest place,
it hurts our eyes to see the glow.
Sometimes a word of hope reminds us of our fears,
our memories and tears.

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms
throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love
is burning bright, living in the light.

2 When night is round us and every shadow grows,
a star is there to light our way.
It tells a story of Jesus who came near to say:
'God's light will ever stay.'

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms
throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love
is burning bright, living in the light.

3 And Jesus showed us a brighter path to walk.
He showed us things we hadn't seen.
Now we, like Jesus, can help creation shine,
and this will be a sign:

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms
throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love
is burning bright, living in the light.

4 So let us live in the brightness God has giv'n,
and let us rise to see the dawn.
We trust that God is here a-sparkle and ablaze,
warming all our days.

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms
throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love
is burning bright, living in the light.

Sermon **Following The Light**

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Hymn **Gaudete (Rejoice)**

Rejoice, rejoice
For Christ has come among us

Of the Virgin Mary born
So rejoice
Rejoice, rejoice
For Christ has come among us
Of the Virgin Mary born
So rejoice

1 The time of grace is drawing near
For which we have waited
Let us worship faithfully
Life is celebrated

2 God becomes as one of us
Nature is astounded
All the world has been renewed
Sin has been confounded

Rejoice, rejoice
For Christ has come among us
Of the Virgin Mary born
So rejoice
Rejoice, rejoice
For Christ has come among us
Of the Virgin Mary born
So rejoice

3 The closed gate of Ezekial
Passed through like a river
Now the Light is rising up
We will be delivered

4 Praise the glory that arrives
Sing in celebration
God will bless the coming child
Who will bring salvation

Rejoice, rejoice
For Christ has come among us
Of the Virgin Mary born
So rejoice
Rejoice, rejoice
For Christ has come among us
Of the Virgin Mary born
So rejoice

Offering

Loving GOD, we praise and thank you for the many gifts and blessings we have received in our lives.

Through your Holy Spirit, may we use these gifts to strengthen us as faithful followers. Show us how to live as Jesus did, with love and compassion and justice for all creation.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, may we reaffirm our love and commitment to you.
Our spirits rejoice in you as we offer these gifts of our hearts and lives. Amen.

We sing:

In The Bleak Midwinter (v. 4)

VU 55

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise one, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him – give my heart!

Prayers of the People

You, O God, the one beyond all knowing, it is you we long to know, even as we know that you are more than we understand. Your spirit and presence, a being that transcends our ability to put you in a box.

We know that as soon as we put limits around who and what you are, then it is no longer you. Help our unknowing so that we can grasp a portion, catch a glimpse, hold on to something of you, for we desire a deeper knowledge of you and your desires of us as your people.

Help us in our search for justice that we can be led in discernment of what is right and just, help us recognize the kindness of compassion, as expressed in the diversity you bestow upon us.

We pray these things with words, with the thoughts of our minds, and with the feelings of our hearts. We offer our prayers from the depths of our souls and with freshness of spirit, expressed in this time of silence ...

Moment of silence

May we be messengers of your love for the world; we ask in Jesus' name ...

**Creator, 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 and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever, Amen.**

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

VU 8

1 Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung,
of Jesse's lineage coming,
as seers of old have sung.
It came a blossom bright,
amid the cold of winter,
when half spent was the night.

2 Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
the Rose I have in mind,
with Mary we behold it,
the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright
she bore for us a Saviour
when half spent was the night.

3 This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor
The darkness everywhere.
True man, yet very God,
From sin and death He saves us
And lightens every load.

Commissioning and Benediction

May you discover waiting for you the shareable gift of GOD's love, joy and happiness, knowing we are not alone.

May the joy God has given us radiate in our souls, warming all we meet.

Go with God's blessing and share it with the world.

Amen.

Choral Benediction

Go Now In Peace

Go now in peace, never be afraid
God will go with you each hour of every day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true,
Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love and show you believe
Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there, watching from above
Go now in peace, in faith and in love.
Amen, amen, amen!

Postlude

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