



Birchcliff Bluffs United Church

Ministers: All the People – wherever and however they gather

Minister of Word & Sacrament: Katie Vardy

Music Director: Randy Vancourt

The Road to Bethlehem

December 14th, 2025

3rd Sunday of Advent – Joy

WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE

Prelude

Lighting the Rainbow Candle

As we light the Rainbow Candle, we remember that God’s love is wide and welcoming. May this small flame shine with courage and compassion, a reminder that all belong, all are cherished, and all are held in the heart of God. *Candle is lit.*

Land Acknowledgement

As we enter this season of Advent—a time of waiting, listening, and preparing—we acknowledge that we do so on the sacred lands of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, Chippewa, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. This land has been a place of story and spirit long before our candles were lit or our hymns were sung. Creator has been present here through the teachings, ceremonies, and care of Indigenous peoples whose stewardship continues to this day.

As we journey through Advent, may we commit ourselves to the ongoing work of reconciliation—honouring the land, respecting its First Peoples, and walking a path of right 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!

Lighting our Advent Candles

Last week, we lit candles for Hope and for Peace. Today we light the third candle—the candle of Joy. This joy is not naive or shallow. It does not ignore pain or silence doubt. It is the joy that rises even in prison cells and wilderness places, the joy that knows: God is still at work.

**We light a candle for Joy—
for the joy that sings even when tears fall,
for the joy that builds community from brokenness,
for the joy that comes from love made real.**

When John the Baptist asked, “*Are you the one?*” Jesus did not offer easy words, but pointed to lives transformed—to healing, to welcome, to good news for the poor.

**God of Joy, open our eyes to the miracles already among us.
When doubt weighs heavy, let joy be our companion and guide.
When fear grows loud, let laughter lift our hearts toward hope.**

This candle reminds us: Joy is not found by avoiding the dark,
but by trusting that light is on the way.

Come, Christ of Joy, shine in our hearts, and teach us to rejoice. Amen.

(The first, second, & third candle on the Advent wreath are lit.)

Sung Response:

A Candle Is Burning

VU 6

A candle is burning, a candle of joy,
a candle to welcome brave Mary's new boy.
Our hearts fill with wonder, and eyes light and glow
as joy brightens winter like sunshine on snow.

Passing the Peace

John the Baptist asked, “*Are you the one?*” And Jesus answered not with a speech, but with healing—with lives restored, communities made whole, peace made visible in human touch. When we share the peace of Christ, we take part in that same healing work. So, let it be more than words—let it be a gesture of compassion, a promise that we are not alone.

The peace of Christ be with you all. **And also with you.**

Life and Work

Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

**God of joy in unexpected places,
you come to us when our questions are many and our answers few.
You meet us in our doubts as tenderly as in our devotion.
We confess that we often look for you in signs of success and strength,
when all along you dwell among the overlooked and the ordinary.
Open our eyes to your quiet miracles,
to the joy that grows even in hard soil.
As we worship this day,
let laughter and longing mingle within us;
let courage rise with the dawn of joy.
For you, O God, are making all things new—
even now, even here.
Amen.**

RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

Hymn

Once in Royal David's City

VU 62

- 1 Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattleshed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed.
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.
- 2 He came down to earth from heaven
who, with God, is over all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall.
There among the poor and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.
- 3 For he is our lifelong pattern;
daily, when on earth he grew,
he was tempted, scorned, rejected,
tears and smiles like us he knew.
Thus he feels for all our sadness,
and he shares in all our gladness.
- 4 And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love;
for that child who seemed so helpless
is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.

Shower Curtain Productions: The Road to Bethlehem

All sing:

Angels from the Realms of Glory (1 verse & chorus)

Angels, from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story,
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.

All sing:

We Three Kings.

1 We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.

2 Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign.

O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.

END OF PLAY

Hymn

**While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks
(verses 1-4, & 6)**

VU 75

1 While shepherds watched their flocks by night
all seated on the ground,
the angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.

2 'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind;
'glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and humankind.

3 'To you in David's town this day
is born of David's line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;
and this shall be the sign:

4 'The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swaddling bands,
and in a manger laid.'

6 'All glory be to God on high,
and to the earth be peace!
Good will to all from highest heaven
begin, and never cease.'

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Offering

Joy is contagious when it is shared. In this season, our giving becomes a song of joy for others—bread for the hungry, warmth for the cold, hope for those who have forgotten how to hope. Our gifts—of time, treasure, and tenderness—join the movement of God's transforming love. Let us give, not out of duty, but out of joy that refuses to stay quiet.

As we bless these offerings, let us sing:

Offering Hymn

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

VU 541

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.

Prayers of the People

God of joy that steadies and surprises,
we give thanks for your presence among us—for signs of healing, for glimpses of grace,
for the strength to keep going when hope is thin.

We pray for those who wait and weep this day—for the sick, the grieving, the anxious, the
afraid. Bring comfort where there is pain, peace where there is conflict,
and light where shadows linger.

We pray for all whose lives bear the weight of injustice—for those without safe shelter,
for those denied fair wages, for those fleeing war and persecution.
Let your joy take root as courage, that your people might rise and rebuild.

We pray for your Church, O God—that in our songs, our service, and our speech
we may embody the joy of Christ who turns mourning into dancing
and despair into new beginnings.

And we pray for ourselves—that we may not grow weary in doing good,
that we may hold one another with tenderness, and that joy, quiet and persistent,
may carry us through this season and beyond.

Through the One who is our joy and our companion,
Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kin-dom come,
your 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 yours is the kin-dom,
the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

VU 2

- 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.
- 2 Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.
- 3 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 By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Bread for the Journey

Where do you sense joy rising along your own road this Advent—perhaps quietly,
unexpectedly—inviting you to trust the journey ahead?

Commissioning and Benediction

Go now with hearts that seek joy even in uncertainty.

We will go, trusting that Christ is still among us.

The blind see, the broken are healed, the poor receive good news.

We will go, to live that good news wherever we are sent.

Rejoice, beloved of God—the Holy One is near.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Go now in the spirit of joy—not the fleeting joy of comfort,
but the deep, steady joy that grows from hope and trust.

May you find Christ not only in the answered prayer,
but in the waiting and wondering too.

And may the blessing of God—

Source of joy, Christ of compassion, and Spirit of peace—
go with you and remain with you, now and always.

Amen.

Choral Response

Let There Be Peace on Earth

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be
With God our Creator
Family all are we
Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow
To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me

Postlude

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