

A Home For All (Joy)

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

This week, it would be appropriate to find a **purple cloth** or scarf to signify that we are in a time of "preparation". Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Light Candle

We light a candle to centre us and to draw us towards Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Today is the third Sunday in Advent, we rejoice as the celebration of Christmas draws nearer...

In his letter to the church at Phillipi, Paul wrote to encourage his brothers and sisters in Christ:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Sing - Rejoice In The Lord Always and again I say Rejoice (Scripture in Song 81)

Acknowledgement of Country

Across the vast and beautiful land that is now called Australia, indigenous peoples have cared for the earth since time immemorial.

In this place, between the ocean and the mountains, the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have lived in harmony with the land and waters and its flora and fauna.

We give thanks for them and this place.

We pay our respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

And we pray that we will learn to walk together and to care for one another and this land in ways that honour our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.



Gather Us In | Lisle Gwynn

Call to Worship and Advent Candle of Joy

We re-light the candle of hope, holding our longing for home. [*relight one purple candle*]

And we relight the candle of peace, remembering the foundation that centres us
 [*relight the second purple candle*]

A voice calls out in the wilderness.

It sings of a home for all, a home of justice and peace, a home bursting with joy.

We could choose to ignore it.

Instead, we come into this sacred space.

We let the world grow quiet and we hear:

Joy in the giggles and stretches of a newborn child.

Joy in a tail-wagging dog sliding to meet you at the door.

Joy in unabashed laughter freely shared at tables of hospitality and warmth.

Joy in making it home after a long journey, discovering that you are found when you thought you were lost.

Today we light the candle of joy, because the welcome God has for us is nothing short of good news of great...seriously great, joy! [Light the pink candle]

Family of faith, we are close to home.

Let us worship God.

Cory Nelson, adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

Sing - Hope is A Candle (Seasons 6-17 - v.1,2,4)

Hope is a candle, once lit by the prophets,
never consumed though it burns through the years;
dim in the daylight of power and privilege,
when they are gone, hope will shine on.

Joy is a candle of mystery and laughter, mystery of light that is born in the dark; laughter at hearing the voice of an angel, ever so near, casting out fear.

Peace is a candle to show us a pathway, threatened by gusts from our rage and our greed.

Friend, feel no envy for those in the shadows, violence and force: their dead-end course.

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Words: Richard Leach. Music: Traditional

Prayer

Zephaniah, the prophet declared:

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

Let us pray...

God of all Creation, as we gather this morning, you invite us to celebrate. You invite us to rejoice in your goodness, to enjoy your good creation,

to find joy in our everyday.

Sometimes, we are up for it - ready to celebrate and rejoice.

And sometimes, it is so hard - when the trials and struggles of life threaten to overwhelm us and when the harshness of this world threaten to sap the energy from us.

When we are tired or sad or struggling, wrap your gentle Spirit around us and draw us to you. And when we are filled with your joy, may we be ready to radiate your joy to the world around us. Amen.

Call to Confession

It takes courage to tell the truth.

John the Baptist knew it.

His job as a prophet certainly could not have been easy.

And you and I know it.

Our job as people of faith—to create a home for all—has never been easy.

In our prayer of confession, may we channel some of John the Baptist's courage to tell the truth about ourselves and our world. We do not do this to shame ourselves or guilt ourselves for being imperfect. We speak the truth out loud because we know that we cannot grow and change without first being honest.

So let us be brave. Let us be bold. Let us be truth-tellers as we confess together now to a God who couldn't love us any more than God already does. Let us pray. . .

Prayer of Confession

Expansive God,

We know that the church is your house, and your house has room for everyone.

Yet, too often, instead of setting the table for our neighbours, we block the door.

Instead of welcoming all, we judge others by our own standards.

Instead of sharing our second coat, we hide it in the attic, holding on to fear instead of letting go with love. Remind us that your home is a home for all, that truth requires hard work, that truth requires uncomfortable justice. Help us to be bold enough to see it and brave enough to live it. With hope we pray, amen.

Words of Forgiveness

Family of faith, God sent prophets like John the Baptist to us because this work is not easy. Helping create a world where all might have a home, and all might be loved, and all might know peace, is an audacious goal. Fortunately for us, when we mess up - when we lose our way or forget our call - we are met with grace.

God could not love us any more or any less than God already does.

So rest in this good news:

We are at home with God - forgiven, claimed, and loved.

The door is always open for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Sing - Look Towards Christmas

Look toward Christmas!

Advent is here:

welcome December
changing the year.

Whistle up, shepherds!

Saddle up, kings!

Chorus up, angels,
flexing your wings.

Sing, sing alleluia!

Sing, sing alleluia!

Sing, sing out the story,

Sing about hope and peace.

Set the world singing,
make the world glad;
now is good reason not to feel sad!
Hear John the Baptist
shout to prepare:
Good News is coming,
earth be aware.

Sing...

Mary and Joseph,
soon is the day:
ready the donkey,
start on your way.
You are the chosen,
willing to trust,
joyful your burden,
carrying Christ

Sing...

Shirley Murray

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 3:7-18

⁷ John said to the crowds that came out to be baptised by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' ¹¹In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' ¹²Even tax-collectors came to be baptised, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' ¹³He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection

God of rejoicing, we ground ourselves in your promise that righteousness and justice will prevail. Guide us as we begin the work by leading lives of love, peace, and integrity. Show us ways to share this good news with others. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Advent 3, 12 Dec 21, p.52

I do love John the Baptist.

Janice, last week, described him as “colourful” - and today we hear him in full flight.

“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (3:7)

But if you have been paying attention, today we are supposed to be thinking about “joy”. So how are John’s declarations joyful?!

Remember, last week, we heard the first part of this section in Luke’s gospel where John appears in the wilderness, “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (3:3).

And whether or not it is obvious at first glance, even if John’s words don’t seem all that joyful or even attractive, Luke tells us that the crowds were drawn to him and even curious (3:7,10) - they heard his words, often depicted as almost ranting in most of the movies, yet the crowds kept coming and Luke says they questioned “in their hearts” (3:15).

So what is going on here?

John calls the crowds to repent - and we pack together the idea of repentance, punishment (fire and winnowing forks) and being called a pack of snakes into one big pile.

First, let’s unpack some of the language...

The word translated for us as repentance, is a greek word, μετανοίας (*metanoia*) which simply means a change of mind, a reorientation, a turning towards. In this case, a turning towards God, a transformation of the way we see ourselves and the world around us. In its pure form, it carries none of the ideas of punishment or “not good enough” that we sometimes attach to it. When John calls the people to repent, he is calling them to something more than a surface change. He is calling them to something much deeper - to shift their focus, to turn again towards God - to be transformed from within in order that we live differently - it is very similar to the cry of the Hebrew prophets throughout the ages.

And “brood of vipers” or “pack of snakes”? John is asking the people in the crowd to question their intentions - do you think you can earn God’s approval simply because you happen to be descended from Abraham, that is, part of the Hebrew people? Heritage and culture are not enough - what is needed is a life transformed in the living out of God’s intention for the world and its peoples.

And it is in this transformation that good news is heard and joy is found.

Joy. Joy that is not about happiness, not about circumstantial things, but about about having come through times of great trial and testing and still somehow hanging on, joy - that there is still the promise of something profound and deep and enduring,¹ and that promise will be fulfilled.

John speaks about a “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (3:3).

Luke’s gospel refers often to the idea that forgiveness brings with it a kind of release - a release from sin, perhaps; but also, a release from all that holds us back from being the people God intends for us to be. The baptism John speaks of is a washing - the crowds came to the Jordan River to be washed in the water - a symbolic act demonstrating their turning, their turning toward God, and in their turning comes forgiveness, a release from all that prevented them living the lives to which God calls them.

But John says, this is just the start. In a description that echoes the fire and Spirit of Pentecost in Acts 2, John speaks of a baptism that will release the power of God’s Spirit to purify, to refine, to transform, to enable, to draw and to lead (3:16).

In the meantime, John gives some practical advice / examples - to the wide range of people who were coming to him.

“What shall we do?”, the people ask (3:10)

¹ Rev Fiona Winn, *By the Well*, podcast for Advent 3, December 2021

Share your clothes with people who are cold.

Share your food with people who are hungry.

Don't rip people off.

Don't exploit people or use your power to gain more for yourself.

I don't think any of this surprises us in any way - but it should still challenge us - how many of us have cupboards full of clothing we don't really need? I know I do.

How much food do we waste? Or how often do we intentionally offer a meal to another or give to organisations who provide for people who are not so well-off?

And how often do we examine the ways we interact with others and allow ourselves to be called on ways we try to dominate or exploit or get what we want for ourselves?

In sharing at the Communion table, we include ourselves in the story of John - just as we include ourselves in the story of Jesus - every time we receive bread and wine, we embrace the idea of forgiveness and release from all that holds us back, we are set free to be the people God has created us to be. Each time we gather here, we claim our place in the movement of the Spirit and open ourselves to the Spirit's prompting and guiding.

As we are nourished, so may we provide nourishment to others.

As we are forgiven, so may we forgive.

As we are released, so may we release others.

As we receive good news, so may we share it.

And so may the joy of God fill your being and overflow into the world around you.

Amen. May it be so.

Responding

Prayers of the People - Maurice Barton

Prayers for Ourselves

Let us consider our personal relationship with God. Are we taking the time we need, every day, to seek God's help in all aspects of our lives? We ask for help in removing the barriers that stand between us and your grace:

We ask for the ability to recognise our pride and for the strength to set it aside. It is not about us but about the love of Jesus Christ who stands at the centre of our lives, if we let Him. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us take a few moments of silence to consider where we are with God.

We ask for the ability to control our anger, including with ourselves, which sometimes spills out and affects others. Help us to question the reasons for our anger and to look for causes within us rather than with others.

There are many things we should be doing to meet our obligations. Give us the resolve and the energy to just get on with it!

We are blessed with many ways of communicating with others. Letters, emails, texts, telephones, SKYPE, social media. At this time of the year especially, we pray for the resolve to pursue links with friends and family which may have fallen into disuse; to mend, develop and strengthen relationships which may mean a lot more to those we have neglected than we realise.

Prayers for those close to us

Christ tells us to love all those we come into contact with and to try to satisfy their immediate needs. Help us to fulfill our responsibilities to our immediate families, our spouses, partners and children. We pray for their safety and that they may come to know the power of your love in their lives. We ask for the patience to support them and not to judge them.

Let us take a few moments of silence to think about anyone for whom we feel special concern.

Prayers for those who are tasked with Government and Leadership

Christ tells us to respect lawful government and to meet our obligations to it. We ask that our politicians and governors at all levels be given the wisdom for fair and decisive leadership, in particular over the coming months as we come out from the threat of COVID.

We pray for the leaders of the Uniting Church, for the Presbytery and for our elders and councillors, that their deliberations be prayerful and guided by the Holy Spirit.

We ask that our church's work in matters of social justice bears fruit and earns respect in the wider community.

May the matters which divide our church be managed and settled in good faith and without recrimination.

Prayers for the World Community of Christians

Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life everlasting. Our task is to make His teachings visible, audible and available wherever and whenever we can, while respecting other religions,

We pray that all Christian churches work in harmony to promote the gospel's teachings, for the leaders of the congregations of the Kiama churches and for Christians everywhere. We give thanks that we live in freedom of expression, without fear of oppression or persecution and pray for the safety of Christians who are not so blessed.

Lord, receive these our prayers. Amen

Sing - Lord, Jesus Christ (TIS 526)

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,
you are one with us,
Mary's son;
cleansing our souls from all their sin,
pouring your love and goodness in,
Jesus, our love for you we sing,
living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, now and every day,
teach us how to pray,
Son of God;
You have commanded us to do
this in remembrance, Lord, of you:
into our lives your power breaks through,
living Lord

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,
born as one of us,
Mary's son;
led out to die on Calvary,
risen from death to set us free,
living Lord Jesus, help us see
you are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, I would come to you,
live my life for you,
Son of God.
All your commands I know are true,
your many gifts will make me new,
into my life your power breaks through,
living Lord.

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Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

Offering

The people asked John, "What should we do?"

I've asked myself that a million times in my life.

How do I make a difference? Can I really do anything that could help this hurting world?

Is it already too late? Is it already too big?

It can feel overwhelming at times, but John says, "If you have two coats, give one away."

It's all that easy, and it's all that hard.

So friends, we take a moment now, offering not just our financial resources but all of who we are, knowing that our contributions, large and small, help build a world where all have a home - where all are welcomed, fed, loved, and known.

What should we do? We should give what we have. It's all that easy and all that hard.

Let us pray...

God who welcomes us home,

who creates space,

who leaves a chair with our name on it -

we have two coats and we are giving one away.

That's what this offering is.

It's our second coat.

It's our hearts on our sleeves.

It's our audacious hope that there can indeed be a better world than this one. So take these gifts and use them to move us closer to that promised day. Gratefully we pray, Amen.

Sending

Sing - Teach Me To Dance

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
teach me to move in the pow'r of your Spirit,
teach me to walk in the light of your presence,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

*Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,
teach me to trust in the word of your promise,
teach me to hope in the day of your coming,
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

You wrote the rhythm of life, created heaven and earth, in you is joy without measure. So, like a child in your sight, I dance to see your delight, for I was made for your pleasure, pleasure.

Teach me to dance...

Let all my movements express a heart that loves to say 'yes', a will that leaps to obey you. Let all my energy blaze to see the joy in your face; let my whole being praise you, praise you.

Teach me to dance...

*Words and music: Graham Kendrick and Steve Thompson
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Benediction

As you leave this service, your service begins:

Comfort the homesick.

Open your doors to others.

Seek sanctuary.

Be brave enough to go home by another way.

And remember that here in this place, all are welcomed—so come back soon.

Benediction by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

And be blessed in the name of God, the source of all life and inspiration.

Be blessed in the name of the Christ whose life liberates our expectations.

Be blessed in the name of the Spirit as she breathes new life through us all. Amen.

Adapted from a blessing by Rev Keree Casey, Of Ash and Rainbows

Sing - As We Go Now (Seasons 6-6)

As we go now from this moment,
as we leave behind our time together.
May we walk with one another,
may we help each other on the way.

As we go now from this moment,
as we go into the future together.
May we treasure one another,
may we realise how precious we are.
May we realise how precious we are.
May we realise how precious we are.

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Words and Music: Stephen Fischbacher

Rev Kath Merrifield

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