

Knox Presbyterian Church
Rev. Emma Duncan
December 14, 2025



Advent Three - Candle of joy

Carol singing before the service (10:15 a.m.)

Welcome

Call to worship (PWS&D Advent Liturgy)

The Tennant and Hudson Family

Leader: Mary praised God who entrusted her with a sacred role. Great things God has done!

People: With Jesus' birth, the world will never be the same again.

Leader: The powerful will be toppled from their thrones. The hungry will be lifted up and joy will break through in unexpected places.

People: Every time a child is born, the world changes for someone. Our lives changed when a humble young woman gave birth to the One who would save us. On this third Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of joy.

The candle of joy is lit.

Let us pray together: Living God, gift us with Mary's trust and readiness to accept your purpose. May we celebrate your coming, as we say with joy: Come, Lord Jesus.

Music: O come, oh come, Emmanuel (#122, verses 1, 3, 5)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession (including The Lord's Prayer)

Heavenly Father, all of creation is holding its breath because the time is almost here. A baby is on the way. Prepare our hearts as you take on a human form. Prepare our minds to experience the birth of Emmanuel, God with us. As we gather from near and far, we praise the name of the Lord! Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

Loving God, you created this world for joy and flourishing. We confess that we construct barriers to protect our happiness, even at the expense of others. We fill ourselves with good things, taking no heed of those who are left empty. We ignore oppression when it

benefits our interests. We dismiss the broken-hearted when we feel inconvenienced. We crave power over liberation.

O Lord, in your mercy, forgive our sins for they are many. Remember us in compassion and come to our aid. Tear down our dividing walls. Scatter our pride and renew our faith.

O blessed Saviour, thank you for your tender loving care and for your endless grace. You challenge us this Advent season to put aside our worries and burdens. You challenge us to sing for joy even though there is so much despair and uncertainty in our world right now. Guide us by your Spirit that the global Church and all believers may serve you in faith and joy.

We pray all these things in the name of our Messiah, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

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

Assurance of Pardon

God came into the world as a helpless infant, not to condemn the world, but to save it. This is Good News of great joy for each of us. Because of all that Jesus accomplished on the cross for us, we experience peace, we are blessed with hope, and we are transformed by love. In the name of Jesus Christ, shout for joy because we are forgiven! Thanks be to God. Amen.

Announcements

1. Welcome! Join us for fellowship down in our hall.
2. Thank yous...
 - a. Janice Spring, Jada Dawson, and Hella Hanson for sharing their musical talents with us
 - b. The Jollymores for providing our luncheon

3. Next Sunday

Christmas Play – The Christmas Lizard

4. White Gifts (Season of Advent) – LAST SUNDAY

It is part of our Christmas tradition to help those in need during the holidays. These are the organizations we support:

- *Burlington Food Bank
- *Carpenter Hospice
- *Reach Out for Kids Centre
- *Wellington Square U.C. community meal program

How can I support this ministry?

Between November 24th and December 15th, you may give a monetary gift (no gift cards please!) by designating “white gift” on your regular envelope or by E-Transfer. Please contact Kathy in the office to make special arrangements. All of the funds received will be equally split between these organizations to support their excellent work in our community!

Christmas Eve service at 4 p.m.

Music: I’ve got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy (on screen only)

Children’s Time: Heart Full of Joy

Special Music: Hark the Herald Angels sing

Jada Dawson

Scripture Readings

Prayer for Illumination

Let us pray. 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.

Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Psalms and we will be reading Responsively Psalm 113.

Leader: Praise the Lord!

People: Praise, O servants of the Lord; praise the name of the Lord.

Leader: Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

People: From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised.

Leader: The Lord is high above all nations and his glory above the heavens.

**People: Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high,
who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?**

Leader: The Lord raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes, with the princes of the people.

**People: The Lord gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.**

All: Praise the Lord! Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Isaiah and we will be reading chapter 61, verses 1-4 and 8-11.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they
shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

Our New Testament reading is taken from the Gospel of Luke and we will be reading chapter 1, verses 39-55.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Music: Long ago, prophets knew (#121, verses 1, 2, 4) Hella to sing first verse as solo

Reflection: The Will to Dream – Unexpected Joy

The passage that I just read from the Gospel of Luke is called the Magnificat or Mary's song. For millennia, the Magnificat has been read and sung during the Advent season. Mary's words of praise offer Christians around the world joy as we move ever closer to the celebration of the birth of Christ. Mary is revered and even worshipped in many branches of the Christian Church. As I have been preparing for this worship service and reflecting on Mary's profoundly beautiful words, I have also been preparing for a funeral service for the Grandmother of a friend. The woman who passed away is named Maria and she was a devout Catholic all of her life. Unfortunately, their parish priest was not available, so they asked me to officiate at her funeral service. While talking to the family, I learned that Maria was a prayer warrior. All throughout her long and challenging life, she prayed to the Lord for strength, courage, and peace. And do you know what her favourite prayer was? Hail Mary. For the first time in my life, I said the Hail Mary prayer yesterday:

Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.¹ Amen.

As someone who was born and raised in the Protestant tradition, this was an interesting experience for me. To be honest, it made me sad because I firmly believe that all branches of the global Church need to come together to worship our Lord and serve his Church in these challenging days. Wouldn't the world be a better place if Protestants and Catholics,

¹ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/the-hail-mary.html>

conservative and liberal Christians would work together to fulfill the teachings of the prophet Isaiah? To bind up the broken-hearted? To proclaim liberty to the captives? To comfort all who mourn? To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour? Christians need to recognize and accept that we have so much in common with other branches of the Church when we focus on our shared ministry to bring good news to the world.

The other thing that struck me this week is that we have to remember not to focus too much on what Mary's body did for the world. We are not just to thank God for her womb. Mary was not simply a vessel for the Son of God who was tossed away after Jesus was born. She was a young woman who was about to become an unwed mother in a time when this was practically a death sentence. She was poor and lived under the military occupation of the Roman Empire. She had every reason to cower in fear because of what was happening to her.

And yet, she did the exact opposite.

She accepted God's divine call upon her life. She did not run away in fear, but rose to the challenge with courage, determination, and faith. From the moment that she saw her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist, she knew that her life would never be the same again. Filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, she proclaimed the coming of the Christ child. And what would this child do? Scatter the proud. Bring down the powerful. Lift up the lowly. Fill the hungry with good things. Send the rich away empty. As we talked about last week when we heard part of John the Baptist's story, Mary's song was no light and fluffy speech that you would embroider onto a pillow cushion. It was – and continues to be - a song of rebellion. It was a warning to the rich and powerful. British poet David Gate wrote in a piece called "Mary is not a silent virgin. She is a political revolutionary" where he says that *Mary is the central figure of Advent,*

*not because she carried Jesus but because she understood him before anyone else.*² And Mary continued to understand Jesus as the Messiah and his divine mission all throughout his life until that horrific day when she watched him suffer and die on the cross, executed by the powerful and rich who found no joy in his ministry.

Mary did not have an easy life but because of her faith in the Lord, she remained true to her Son. And that is because she understood – perhaps better than any of us ever will – that happiness and joy are two very different things. As people of faith, we learn through Mary’s story that we are called to be joyful even during challenging times. Even when we are sad. Even when we grieve. Even when we are afraid of what tomorrow will bring. She taught us through the example of her life that there is light in the midst of darkness. That there is hope in the midst of despair. That there is peace in the midst of conflict. That there is joy in the midst of fear and anxiety. Mary was a revolutionary who stood up against the injustices of empires and pointed towards the Messiah. For the generations of people who rejoice in God our Saviour, Mary’s song is a divine promise that LOVE is on the way. And we are invited to learn her song. To make it our own. In the midst of the struggles that each one of faces, in the midst of the brokenness of our world, we are invited to join our voices with Mary and sing - Joy to the world! The Lord is come!

Amen.

² <https://www.davidgatepoet.com/>

Dedication of our Tithes and Offerings

Song of Thanks: Hope is a star (#119, verse 3)

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.

Prayer of Dedication (not written in advance)

Prayers of the People

Loving God, our spirits rejoice because of your gracious acts towards us, especially the wonderful gift of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks for the prophetic wisdom of the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. We give thanks for the great cloud of witnesses throughout the generations who have pointed us towards the Christ Child born in Bethlehem. Through the guidance of your Holy Spirit, help us to be strong in our faith. Guide us in faith to hear Mary's song and make it our own.

God of Advent hope, we praise you for the Christmas story. It is so familiar to us and yet, we need to hear it over and over again – because the story of your incarnation is not just about a young couple and their cute baby, it is a story about hardship and uncertainty. From your first night on this earth, you slept in a bed that wasn't your own. Jesus' earthly family fled terror and found refuge in foreign lands. You were always the guest in the homes of strangers. You were not always sure of your next meal.

God of Advent peace, we pray for those whose lives are more like yours than we can imagine:

those who are without homes,

those who have been uprooted from their families and communities,

those who have had to flee for their lives,

those who are unsure how to pay their rent or feed their children.

God of Advent joy, we pray for your protection and care for those who suffer because of war, political unrest, natural disasters, oppression, and persecution. We mourn the loss that marks the lives of so many – the loss of dignity, respect, security, community, family, and stability. We mourn the senseless loss of life. Gun violence in the States. Attack on Jewish worshippers in Australia.

God of Advent love, we pray for those in our midst who are suffering. We remember those who are in hospital or recovering from surgery. We remember those who are sick. We pray for families who are struggling with strained relationships, conflict, and uncertainty. We lift up to you those who are grieving the loss of loved ones. This is such a challenging time of year for so many people. We pray for those for whom Christmas is about loneliness and despair and points to a heightened sense of failure rather than any promise of fulfilment. Comfort, O comfort your people, O God.

We remember those who we name before you today...

O Triune, we pray for you to come into our lives, our communities, our Church, our world. Let your light break through the darkness. May all Christians in all branches of the Church be bearers of joy, carrying good news, blessing one another for this journey we share. Help us prepare room for you, Loving God, in every heart, in all the world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Music: Joyful, joyful we adore you (#410, all verses)

Blessing (Luke 1:68-71a)

Sung Amen