



**GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC**

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA**

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**Third Sunday of Advent  
December 15, 2024  
Tree of Life**

Christ's presence in our midst in the wonder of the holy supper is cause for singing. The nearness of the God in prayer, in every circumstance, is cause for rejoicing. The coming of one "more powerful" than John, even with a winnowing fork in hand, is good news—and cause for exultation—for us who are being saved. Great joy is the tone for the third Sunday of Advent.

*We at Grace Lutheran Church strive to reflect and proclaim the love of God shown to us by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by providing an inclusive and supportive environment through loving care and community service.*

A warm welcome to all who are worshipping with us in person or online! We appreciate your contribution to the community today: with your voice, your presence, and just the blessing that you are. May you be nurtured by God's Word, empowered by the love of Christ, and stirred by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in this service this day, for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran Church worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmi̓n̓əm̓ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

## GATHERING

### CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together in the name of the God of our salvation, whom we trust and in whom we shall not be afraid. For the Lord God is our strength and our might, allowing us to joyfully draw water from the abundant wells of blessing and love. So together we exalt God's name and give thanks, proclaiming to the world all the glorious works that God has done, does, and will continue to do in our lives and over all the earth. Let us shout aloud and sing for joy, for great the Holy One, our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

### LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

And in our worship we light the first three candles on this wreath, giving thanks to God for empowering us and forming us in our faith, that we might joyfully see our welcome into God's everlasting arms of hope, peace, and community. May this candle represent our joy in knowing who we are, and that our God knows us, calls us, and graciously saves us, through Jesus Christ. O God of joy, come.

**Let us walk in the redemption of the Lord. Amen.**

*Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah* (#240) verse 1-3

**GATHERING SONG:** Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn (#242)

### GREETING

The hope in Christ, the love of God, and the peace of the Holy Spirit joyfully be with you all.  
**And also with you.**

**HYMN OF PRAISE** (p. 6)

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Merciful God, you come into our midst to be with us as one of us, that we might commune together as friends. Break our resistance to life with you and each other, that our journey on the path of just relationship might reveal to us your unimaginable joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## WORD

### FIRST READING: Zephaniah 3:14-20

A reading from Zephaniah.

*The prophet Zephaniah's message is mostly one of judgment for sin. This reading, however, which comes from the conclusion of the book, prophesies joy for Judah and Jerusalem. Judgment has led to repentance, and God's salvation is at hand.*

<sup>14</sup> Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
shout, O Israel!

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

<sup>15</sup> The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;  
he has turned away your enemies.

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

<sup>16</sup> On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

“Do not fear, O Zion;  
do not let your hands grow weak.

<sup>17</sup> The LORD, your God, is in your midst,  
a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing  
<sup>18</sup> as on a day of festival.”

I will remove disaster from you,  
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

<sup>19</sup> I will deal with all your oppressors  
at that time.

And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.

<sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you home,  
at the time when I gather you;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes, says the LORD.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **PSALM: Isaiah 12:2-6**

<sup>2</sup> Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid,  
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might, and has become my salvation.

<sup>3</sup> **With joy you will draw water  
from the wells of salvation.**

<sup>4</sup> And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on God’s name;  
make known the deeds of the LORD among the nations; proclaim that this name is exalted.

<sup>5</sup> **Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be known in all the earth.**

<sup>6</sup> Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

### **SECOND READING: Philippians 4:4-7**

A reading from Philippians.

*Despite being in prison, Paul is remarkably upbeat as he writes this letter. Here, he urges his friends in Philippi to trust God with all their worries and concerns with the hope that they will experience God’s joy and peace.*

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and

supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION** (TOL p. 10)

**GOSPEL: Luke 3:7-18**

The holy gospel according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*John the Baptist heralds the mighty one who is coming. John teaches that preparation for God's reign is not a matter of identity but of bearing fruits of merciful justice, radical generosity, and vocational integrity.*

<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and 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. <sup>9</sup> Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, "What, then, should we do?" <sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."

<sup>14</sup> Soldiers 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."

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His 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."

<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**SERMON**

Holy God, by your Word may we be guided into your ultimate assurance of peace and joy, giving us hope in your Spirit of love and right relationship, in the name of Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

"So with many *other exhortations* he proclaimed the good news to the people."

Yeah, because being called a brood of vipers really sounds like good news, thanks. I don't know about the rest of you, but I totally feel like I've been "exhorted" whenever I'm called out for being a hypocrite. Nothing really brings out the joy of this festive season like having a crazy camel hair guy yell at us for apparently not understanding what he's saying when we're just trying to do the right thing. Thanks, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent John the baptizer, for the quality preachable content. \*thumbup\*

Of course, you could probably tell that I was trying to be as sarcastic as possible. I just thought it was funny that today's gospel passage ends the way it does, when all John really did was rip them all a new one. So it's like Luke had to spell it out for everyone, like okok John was being a bit harsh here, made them all feel bad, but he really was telling them good news. Like, yes he called them names, but it was meant to be good news...

But the thing is, John isn't exactly wrong, is he? I mean the people *were* being hypocritical. The people *didn't* really get it. The people really only had *their* own best interests in mind. And we might think, well of course they were like that, they don't have the benefit of 2000 years of scholarship and learning and hindsight like *we* do. If they did, they wouldn't have been so hypocritical, they would have understood it better, they would have been more like us in our comfy positions as God's people.

Well, the thing is, are we actually much better?

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we're all only bad or anything like that. Nor am I about to point out individual shortcomings and sin shame anyone. I'm not even going to call us names like John the baptizer did. I'm just saying that we aren't perfect either, in spite of our best intentions. Not by a long shot. No matter what we tell ourselves when we look in the mirror or post up on social media or let off in front of our peers and those around us.

And this is somehow... good news? We are somehow supposed to feel better knowing this? Can we somehow find any kind of joy in the midst of all that?

Are these the kind of exhortations John used to tell the people good news? Because it doesn't seem to be hitting the mark exactly.

Again, this isn't to say that we're miserable like all the time. I'm just saying that sometimes, or perhaps often times, life can be difficult. And when it gets tough, we don't always act or talk or be how we might want to be. We might get weighed down by the things. We might feel the strain and stress of it all. We might be overwhelmed with hit after hit, blow after blow, and website problem after website problem. And when it really comes down to it, sometimes in these situations we find that our hope is dashed, our peace becomes unrecognisable, and our joy might almost be completely gone.

Today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Advent that is centered around the theme of joy, but like we just talked about, it seems like joy isn't always all that readily available, especially when we get to this time of year, in spite of what the greeting cards say. I mean it doesn't really seem like a joyful time with the incessant rains and longer and darker nights. We don't feel joy when we're stressed out over our Christmas preparations, our Christmas gift buying, and various Christmas events that take up so much time. It doesn't look like joy when there is so much division in our city and country, so much anger targeted toward those different from us, so much hatred because the world isn't exactly as it should be according to us.

Yet, the texts that we get for today, I mean the *other* texts that don't feature crazy camel hair guy, tell us of this joy. They actually *do* exhort us with rejoicing and encouragement. They lift up the reasons to be joyful.

But maybe it's easy for them to say, right? Like they're scripture writers, prophets, apostles. They were able to see first hand what God can do in and around their lives. They saw and witnessed the deliverance, the miracles, the reasons to be joyful.

But was it easier for them though?

I mean Isaiah wrote today's portion while Israel was in their first exile from their land. Zephaniah, who I admit to not know much about either, mostly talks about the inevitable second exile of Israel and the impending judgement of God. And Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church from jail. Not exactly joyful times these characters come from. Not exactly surrounded by joyful themes. Not many reasons apparent to us for them to ever talk about rejoicing at all.

But they do.

Somehow in their despair, they were able to rejoice. Somehow in their hurt and pain they were able to find joy. Somehow in the harsh realities of the life in this world, they were able to see good news.

The good news of forgiveness and grace. The good news of love and community. The good news of God with us. Then. Now. Always.

This doesn't take away their hardship. This didn't bring Israel back into their promised land or protect them from being exiled again. This didn't free Paul from prison. I mean even after all that, after all their words, after all their realising their joy, bad things still happened. Hurt still happened. Life still happened.

And that is ok. Because their joy isn't based on their current situations. Their ability to rejoice in the good news of God doesn't come from just the good times. Their realisation of who they are in God's grace isn't dependant on their physical location, their own works and ability to cope, or even what preachers tell them how they should feel. Rather, all that comes from the will, the Word, the unending truth of God's promises to us all, lifting us up into hope, peace, and the confidence that tells us that God will never leave us, never stop loving us, never stop welcoming us into a purposeful and meaningful life.

Again, this doesn't mean that all our problems should go away or the weather should instantly improve or someone miraculously takes care of the rest of our Christmas preparations and/or gift buying. But it means that even when our situations change, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse, that God remains *unchanged* in how much we are included in this story that spans eternity, this salvation that spreads throughout space, this love that surpasses understanding.

And so when we inevitably face problems, let's not just fall into the anger and frustration that would be so easy to do. Instead, let's be reminded to look out for the ways that God might be present through it all. That's what Advent is about, isn't it? Preparing the way like we talked about last week?

So, then, what should we do?

Well, it isn't about just going through the motions, but it's about opening our hearts and minds. It isn't about following the rules and obeying the laws, but it's about learning how to see God in our lives, each other's lives, and in the world. It isn't about preventing bad things from happening to us or our loved ones, but it's about recognising how through it all, we are always given reasons to rejoice. Always.

It might not be in the form of miraculous miracles or a prophetic prophecies or angels lighting up the sky in song, but it could be in the form of a baby born among us. It could be in the faces and kindness of our community and those around us. It could even be in the warm smile and generosity of a stranger.

The point is, even when life can be tough, who we are as God's people doesn't change. Even when the days are literally and metaphorically shorter and darker, there is still light that breaks through it. Even when we find ourselves in impossible situations, there will always be a reason to be joyful, because God's undying love for us is here, has always been here, and will always be here in our hearts, in our communities, and throughout the world.

So again, I say rejoice. For God is with us, loves us, and saves us from a life without hope, and grants us a peace that never ends or leaves us.

As we come very close to the end of Advent and into the very busy hecticness of Christmas, may we continually be prepared to see God in the world and in our lives, that we be confident in the hope of our salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding! (#246)

**CREED** (TOL p. 12)

Together in right relationship with God and each other, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.\*  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

#### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Brought into the joy of God's gracious salvation, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "by your reforming mercy, O God," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. By your reforming mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you are our salvation and in you we trust, for you are our strength and might. You bring us joy with all that you do and teach us, and you lead us to see the equality in your kingdom where you bless our service to you and to others. We lift in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those who use this building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, rostered ministers, congregations, and ministries of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Comox and the pastors and leaders that serve there; as well as our seminaries in Saskatoon and Waterloo and all their faculty, staff, and students. By your reforming mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you freely give us the joy of your salvation and we see it clearly in your creation of all that is, was, and is to come. Help us as we care for all that you have entrusted to us and

increase our respect for the lands and all its creatures. By your reforming mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O God, we give thanks for all that you have done and proclaim your deeds to all the nations. Humble all governing bodies and individual politicians to hear your promises of grace and love, that all be motivated to work toward peace in the world. We continue to pray for the support of those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; Solyana Amanuel; Filimon Abraha; as well as for those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. By your reforming mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O God, we sing praises to you, for you have gloriously welcomed us into your presence and revealed to us the wholeness of your love. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love might shine in all our lives. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Debbie; Beulah; Bev and family; John and Betty; Sukhwant; Bishop Kathy; Pastor Kristen; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Hwee Yang; Ephraim; Georgina; Teddy and family; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

By your reforming mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you bless us with your wondrous and holy presence with us in our midst. At the same time you welcome us into your kingdom to live in faith with you and all the saints. May their memories always be fresh in our hearts, that their lives of faith and joy serve as an inspiration for our relationships and communities. By your reforming mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the joy of your salvation to guide us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

## **MEAL**

### **DIALOGUE (TOL p. 14)**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

## **PREFACE**

It is indeed right, our duty and joy that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who baptizes us with fire and the Spirit, reforming us to be your people, joined together with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the whole church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (TOL p. 14)**



## **THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

Holy are you, O God, for all that you have done and do for the sake of your gospel living in our community. You lift us up out of our shortcomings and shame and reveal to all how we have been created in your image as your people. And in the fullness of time you send to us your Son Jesus, to further remind us of how vast and expansive is your love and grace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it with all saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

And then after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and passed it around the table for them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this bread and cup that we can catch a glimpse of the salvation that we have been welcomed into, even as we together declare this mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

It is by your love that we are saved, O God, giving us the hope in the peace that comes you're your blessing within our hearts, granting us the joy of your community and kingdom, shared with and by and because of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## **LORD'S PRAYER (TOL p. 17)**

Gathered into joy by God's saving grace, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.**

## **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

Taste and see the joy of our salvation.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **COMMUNION**

**COMMUNION HYMNS:** Lamb of God (p. 17)  
Blessed Be the God of Israel (#250)  
Wait for the Lord (#262)

## **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Holy God, again you have fed us with your heavenly food and revealed to us your love. May our joy in your name be strengthened, that our service to you and our community and our witness to your gospel be faithful and pleasing in your sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **SENDING**

### **BLESSING**

May the God of justice be your path,  
the Lord of mercy be your guide,  
and the Spirit of joy be your light, this day and always.  
**Amen.**

**SENDING HYMN:** Joy to the World (#267)

### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, live in mercy and joy.  
**Thanks be to God.**