

St. Mark's Presbyterian Church
Third Sunday of Advent – December 17, 2023

Responsive Call to Worship

The prophets call and an apostle writes to announce that joy comes from God.

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me...and has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, ...to comfort all who mourn; ...to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning...” (Isaiah 61)

**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice.”
(Philippians 4)**

Grief, pain and loss are inevitable. But woven into life is the joy of living in a universe that reflects God's beauty. Advent provides time to nurture joy in our lives and in the world God loves. Advent calls us to share with others the good news that comes into the world with the birth of Christ. Holy are you, Source of all new life among us.

Jesus Christ comes as joy to the world. We join with all creation and lift our hearts in joyful praise. We light this candle to glow for joy

(while lighting the candle of joy)

Hymn 410 Joyful, joyful we adore you

**1. Joyful, joyful, we adore you,
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before you,
opening to the sun above.**

**Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
drive the dark of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day!**

**2. All your works with joy surround you;
earth and heaven reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,**

flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain
join to praise you joyfully.

3. You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blessed,
well-spring of the joy of living,
ocean-depth of happy rest!
God Creator, Christ our Saviour,
all are yours who live in love.
Teach us how to love our neighbour,
Lift us to your joy above.

4. Morning stars, awake the chorus,
mortals join in every part,
for what joy is set before us
as Christ's love joins heart to heart!
Ever singing, march we onward,
victors in the midst of strife;
joyful music leads us sunward
in the triumph song of life.

Prayer of Praise *(minister)*

Hymn 165 **O little town of Bethlehem**

1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:
yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. For Christ is born of Mary, and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of
wondering love.

O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.

3. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings born of
heaven.

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters
in.

4. O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;

**cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
oh come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel.**

Prayer of Confession (congregation)

We confess the smallness of our love and the narrowness of our concern. These days we easily become preoccupied with statistics and case numbers. Opportunities to say thanks, to offer encouragement, to remember each other in friendship slip by. Anxiety turns us inward and anger can make us lash out.

Forgive us for neglecting the joy at the heart of the Advent season. Turn our hearts back to you and inspire us with your love made flesh in Jesus Christ.

- silent confession -

The Lord's Prayer (Debts/Debtors)

**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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon (minister)

Hymn 168 See amid the winter's snow

**1 See, amid the winter's snow,
born for us on earth below,
see the Lamb of God appears,
promised from eternal years.**

Refrain:

Hail, O ever blessed morn!

Hail, redemption's happy dawn!

Sing through all Jerusalem,

Christ is born in Bethlehem.

**2 Lo, within a manger lies
he who built the starry skies;**

**and who, throned in height sublime,
sits amid the cherubim!**

Refrain:

**Hail, O ever blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.**

**3 Say, now holy shepherds, say,
tell your joyful news today;
tell us why you left your sheep
on the lonely mountain steep.**

Refrain:

**Hail, O ever blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.**

**4 "As we watched at dead of night,
lo! we saw a wondrous sight,
angels singing peace on earth,
told us of the Saviour's birth."**

Refrain:

**Hail, O ever blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.**

**5 Sacred Infant, all divine,
of God's tender love the sign,
for you came from highest bliss
down to such a world as this!**

Refrain:

**Hail, O ever blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.**

Responsive Reading Psalm 126 p. 576 NT & Psalms

¹When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem,
it was like a dream!

**²We were filled with laughter,
and we sang for joy.**

And the other nations said,

“What amazing things the Lord has done for them.”

³Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us!

What joy!

**⁴Restore our fortunes, Lord,
as streams renew the desert.**

⁵Those who plant in tears
will harvest with shouts of joy.

**⁶They weep as they go to plant their seed,
but they sing as they return with the harvest.**

New Living Translation (NLT)

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Scripture Lessons

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

p. 607 pew Bible

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

p. 356 NT & Psalms

John 1:6-8, 19-28

p. 156NT & Psalms

Reader: This is the word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God!

Sermon Is this another (false) choice?

Prayers of the People (*minister*)

Hymn 151 Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming

**1. Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung,
of Jesse's lineage coming,
as prophets long have sung.
It came, a floweret bright,
amid the cold of winter,
when halfspent 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 to us a Saviour,
when halfspent was the night.**

3. This flower, whose fragrance tender

with sweetness fills the air,
dispels with glorious splendour
our darkness everywhere.
True flesh, yet very God,
from sin and death he saves us
and shares our every load.

4. O Saviour, child of Mary,
who felt our human woe,
O Saviour, King of glory,
who dost our weakness know,
bring us at length, we pray,
to the bright courts of heaven
and to the endless day.

Offering & Offertory

***Doxology 830 Praise God from whom all blessings flow**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise him all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Prayer of Dedication (congregation)

God of justice and joy, we bring our gifts to you in gratitude
for your unfailing goodness to us. Bless these gifts and use
them to create justice and bring joy into the world in Jesus'
name. Amen.

Hymn 153 Joy to the world

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
let earth receive its King;
let every heart prepare him room
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

2. Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns:
let us our songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

**3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.**

**4. He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.**

Choral Blessing

**Go now in peace. Never be afraid.
God will be with you each hour of every day.
God will be there, watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.**

Benediction

Three-fold Amen

Piano Postlude