

Sunday Worship Service – December 14, 2025

Third Sunday of Advent

The hymns are from ELWB

Words of Welcome

Land Acknowledgement & Welcome Statement

Introduction¹

A note of joyful expectation marks today's worship. Isaiah announces that the desert shall rejoice and blossom, and Jesus points to the unexpected and transforming signs of God's reign. We wait with patience for the coming of God, even as we rejoice at Christ's presence among us this day: in word and holy supper, in church and in our homes, in silent reflection and in works of justice and love. We pray that God would open our eyes and ears to the wonders of Christ's advent among us.

Advent Wreath Lighting

The first candle was the candle of peace. The second candle was the candle of hope. This is the candle of joy. It reminds us of the song of joy that Mary sang when she heard the news that she was to bear the Savior of the world.

Let us pray.

We praise and adore you, almighty God. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. All creation sings your praise and we offer you all thanks for the gift of this new day. May we be filled with the joy of advent and rejoice in worship together. Amen.

A Candle is Burning² (tune: #277 *Away in a Manger*)

Verse 3

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.

¹ Sundaysandseasons.com, Copyright © 2022 Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.

² Written by Rev Sue Neville, ELCIC pastor of Eastern Synod

Prayer of Confession*

God of joy, you call us to wait, to watch, to be ready.
 But we are so easily distracted, busily doing other things.
 We grow drowsy and complacent.
 Give us wisdom, as we prepare for your coming.
 Forgive our foolishness and our impatience.
 Restore us by your grace.
 Look upon us with your favour, that we might know your presence.
 Shape us into vessels of blessing, for we are your children,
 longing to touch your Spirit. Amen.

Words of Assurance

John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus,
 "Are you the one who is to come?"
 Jesus answered, "Go and tell what you have seen here –
 the blind can see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised."
 Through Jesus Christ we are forgiven and filled with hope, peace, and joy
 In the name of the + Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

#242 Gathering Hymn *"Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn"*

1. **Awake! Awake, and greet the new morn, for angels herald its dawning.
 Sing out your joy, for soon he is born, behold! the Child of our longing.
 Come as a baby weak and poor, to bring all hearts together,
 he opens wide the heav'nly door and lives now inside us for ever.**
2. **To us, to all in sorrow and fear, Emmanuel comes a singing,
 his humble song is quiet and near, yet fills the earth with its ringing;
 music to heal the broken soul and hymns of loving kindness,
 the thunder of his anthems roll to shatter all hatred and blindness.**
3. **In darkest night his coming shall be, when all the world is despairing,
 as morning light so quiet and free, so warm and gentle and caring.
 Then shall the mute break forth in song, the lame shall leap in wonder,
 the weak be raised above the strong, and weapons be broken asunder.**
4. **Rejoice, rejoice, take heart in the night, though dark the winter and cheerless,
 the rising sun shall crown you with light, be strong and loving and fearless.
 Love be our song and love our prayer and love our endless story;**

may God fill ev'ry day we share and bring us at last into glory.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

Call to Worship³

Come, let us magnify God in word and deed.

God is doing so many marvelous things.

Come, share in God's dream for us and the world.

We come to hear and to learn and to be prepared for the task ahead.

May this time of worship lead us onto God's holy highway.

Come, let's dream, and then let's do.

Prayer of the Day⁴

God of joy, **as the days darken and the winter winds blow, come to us in our time of waiting. Shine the light of your healing joy into the darkness of our land. Live in and through us that we may be messengers of your grace and instruments of your peace, hope, and joy. Amen.**

Bread of Life Choir

First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10

In the reading from Isaiah, the prophet describes the return from the Babylonian captivity as a joyous procession to Zion. God's coming reign will bring a renewal of creation in which health and wholeness will be restored. There is no need for fear, for God is coming to save.

The desert and the dry land will be glad;

the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus.

They will burst into bloom, and rejoice with joy and singing.

They will receive the glory of Lebanon, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon.

They will see God's glory, the splendor of our God.

³ Call to Worship from *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2016 Edition*, edited by Mary J. Scifres and B. J. Beu. Copyright © 2015 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

⁴ Written by Rev Sue Neville, ELCIC pastor of Eastern Synod

Strengthen the weak hands, and support the unsteady knees.
 Say to those who are panicking: "Be strong! Don't fear!
 Here's your God, God will come to save you."
 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
 and the ears of the deaf will be cleared.
 Then the lame will leap like the deer, and the tongue of the speechless will sing.
 Waters will spring up in the desert, and streams in the wilderness.
 The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground, fountains of water.
 The jackals' habitat, a pasture; grass will become reeds and rushes.
 A highway will be there. It will be called The Holy Way.
 The unclean won't travel on it, but it will be for those walking on that way.
 Even fools won't get lost on it;
 no lion will be there, and no predator will go up on it.
 None of these will be there; only the redeemed will walk on it.
 The God's ransomed ones will return and enter Zion with singing,
 with everlasting joy upon their heads.
 Happiness and joy will overwhelm them; grief and groaning will flee away.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

Second Reading: James 5:7-10

In the reading from James, we hear that in anticipation of the Lord's coming, Christians are called upon to cultivate patience rather than discontent.

Therefore, brothers and sisters and siblings, you must be patient as you wait
 for the coming of God. Consider the farmer who waits patiently for the
 coming of rain in the fall and spring, looking forward to the precious fruit of
 the earth. You also must wait patiently, strengthening your resolve,
 because the coming of God is near. Don't complain about each other, so
 that you won't be judged. Look! The judge is standing at the door!
 Brothers and sisters and siblings, take the prophets who spoke in the name
 of God as an example of patient resolve and steadfastness.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

#262 Gospel Acclamation “Wait for the Lord”

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart! (2x)

Gospel Reading: Matthew 11:2-11

In the gospel from Matthew, John the Baptist expects the Messiah to bring God’s judgment upon the earth. From a prison cell, he wonders whether Jesus is the one who will do this. Jesus’ response indicates that God’s reign is indeed being fulfilled already through healing and restoration.

The holy gospel according to Matthew, the 11th chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Now when John heard in prison about the things the Christ was doing,
he sent word by his disciples to Jesus, asking,
“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”
Jesus responded, “Go, report to John what you hear and see.
*Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled are walking.
People with skin diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear.
Those who were dead are raised up.
The poor have good news proclaimed to them.*
Happy are those who don’t stumble and fall because of me.”
When John’s disciples had gone, Jesus spoke to the crowds about John:
“What did you go out to the wilderness to see?
A stalk blowing in the wind? What did you go out to see?
A man dressed up in refined clothes?
Look, those who wear refined clothes are in royal palaces.
What did you go out to see? A prophet?
Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.
He is the one of whom it is written:
*Look, I’m sending my messenger before you,
who will prepare your way before you.*
“I assure you that no one who has ever been born
is greater than John the Baptist.
Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

#264 Hymn of the Day *“Prepare the Royal Highway”* (v.1,3,4)

1. Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near!
Let ev’ry hill and valley a level road appear!
Then greet the King of glory, foretold in sacred story:
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God’s word!
3. Then fling the gates wide open to greet your promised king!
Your king, yet ev’ry nation its tribute too may bring.
All lands will bow before him; their voices join your singing:
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God’s word!
4. His is no earthly kingdom; it comes from heav’n above.
His rule is peace and freedom and justice, truth, and love.
So let your praise be sounding for kindness so abounding:
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God’s word!

Affirmation of Faith for Advent⁵

We believe in God, creator and lover of the earth,
origin and destiny of us all.

We believe in Jesus the Christ—

God coming to us in the fragile promise of a baby yet unborn—
who emerges as the herald of hope, God's laughter in the face of despair.
Plunged into death and hell, he broke free the captives,
and is leading the way to the land of promise
where justice and peace will flourish.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who implants the seed of truth,
brings us to birth as the body of Christ,
and empowers us to confront and transform
all that is corrupt, degrading and deceitful.

We believe in the coming reign of God.

Announced by John the Baptist, it has drawn near to us in Jesus,

⁵ <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/11/advent-affirmation-of-faith.html>— written by Nathan Nettleton, and posted on his Laughingbird website.

and gathers us into the joyous fulfilment of God's desire.

For the coming of that day on this day, we pray:

Come, Lord Jesus, Come!

Prayers of Intercession⁶

Sharing of the Peace

Offering Prayer*

God of joy, **we give you thanks for the outpouring of your Spirit and your gifts of peace, hope, and joy. Receive the gifts we offer that your light may shine in us and among us and your love may be re-born in the world.**

Amen.

Holy Communion⁷

God is with you. **And also with you.**

Come, Emmanuel, God with us, into our longing hearts.

We lift them up to you.

As we gather at this table, **in anticipation and hope.**

God of hopeful expectation, who enters into our stories,
who births new life into creation,
who invites us into a rich and restoring relationship.
We come before you with humble hearts to greet you in our midst.

You were there when creation burst into being, with endless possibilities.
You were there when the Israelites tasted liberty,
and you opened their eyes to new freedom.
You were there, with Mary, when she became a powerful vessel and witness,
to birth love into the world.
You were there with Jesus when he prayed in the garden,
when he confronted death and brought resurrection life to your people.

⁶ <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources/2025-12-14/0#texts>

⁷ Written by Rev Tanya Ramer, ELCIC pastor in the Eastern Synod

And you are with us now, as we gather at your table;
 Your meal and gift of love for all who come hungry and thirsty today.
 We come, like those first disciples,
 gathered around the table to hear Jesus' words of promise and hope.

On the night that he last ate with his disciples,

Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
 broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
 Take and eat, this is my body, given for you.
 Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, Jesus took the cup,
 Gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
 This cup is the covenant in my blood,
 Shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
 Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering Jesus' life, death and resurrection,
 We offer these fruits of creation, bread and wine,
 And ourselves in grateful service.

Thank you for your Spirit who works in and among us,
 in times of hope-filled anticipation.
 Who strengthens and sustains us,
 and who, challenges and prods us.
 Who gives us life and continues to surprise us with extravagant grace.
 Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.
 All honour and glory are yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**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, forever and ever.
Amen.**

Communion Distribution

#482 Communion Hymn *"I Come with Joy"*

- 1. I come with joy a child of God, forgiven, loved, and free,
the life of Jesus to recall in love laid down for me,
in love laid down for me.**
- 2. I come with Christians far and near to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love in Christ's communion bread,
in Christ's communion bread.**
- 3. As Christ breaks bread, and bids us share, each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one, and strangers now are friends,
and strangers now are friends.**
- 4. The Spirit of the risen Christ, unseen, but ever near,
is in such friendship better known, alive among us here,
alive among us here.**
- 5. Together met, together bound by all that God has done,
we'll go with joy, to give the world the love that makes us one,
the love that makes us one.**

Communion Blessing

Prayer after Communion

We give you thanks almighty God, that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of love and forgiveness. Strengthen us through this gift, in faith toward you in love toward one another. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Announcements

Blessing⁸

The Holy Way of God lies before us.

Let us walk in God's Way,

with the strength and the promise of God in our hearts,

And with the example of Jesus to guide our steps.

In the name of the + Creator, the Redeemer, and the Comforter. Amen.

#244 Sending Hymn "*Rejoice, Rejoice Believers*"

1. **Rejoice, rejoice, believers, and let your lights appear;
the evening is advancing, and darker night is near.
The bridegroom is arising, and soon is drawing nigh.
Up, pray and watch and wrestle; at midnight comes the cry.**
2. **The watchers on the mountain proclaim the bridegroom near;
go forth as he approaches with alleluias clear.
The marriage feast is waiting; the gates wide open stand.
Arise, O heirs of glory; the bridegroom is at hand.**
3. **The saints, who here in patience their cross and suff'rings bore,
shall live and reign forever when sorrow is no more.
Around the throne of glory the Lamb they shall behold;
in triumph cast before him their diadems of gold.**
4. **Our hope and expectation, O Jesus, now appear;
arise, O Sun so longed for, o'er this benighted sphere.
With hearts and hands uplifted, we plead, O Lord, to see
the day of earth's redemption that sets your people free!**

Sending

Go in peace, hope, and joy, to love and serve God. **Thanks be to God!**

Sources:

Bible passages (except where otherwise indicated) from Common English Bible (CEB) and have been adapted for inclusive language.

⁸ *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2016 Edition*, edited by Mary J. Scifres and B. J. Beu. Copyright © 2015 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.