

The Glebe-St. James United Church

Second Sunday of Christmas

January 4, 2026

Gathered by God

PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

WELCOME

Pam Fitch

In the name of the Holy Mystery,
who is Wholly Love,
we welcome you to God's House.

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to our worship service at Glebe-St. James United Church in central Ottawa on Sunday, January 4th.

My name is Pam Fitch. (Why do you attend GSJ?)

We're so glad you're here today. Whether you're a first-time guest or a longtime member, whether you are joining us in person or online, we hope you feel at home. This is a place of faith, love, and community. Glebe-St. James is an Affirming Community of Faith in the United Church of Canada. We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment where people of all ages, backgrounds, and identities feel loved and supported. Thank you for being here.

Friends, note who is seated near you and extend our hospitality. If you want more information about Glebe-St. James, green cards are available near the entrances and during coffee hour. Just fill one out and place it on the offering plate or give it to one of the greeters and they will pass it into the office.

Today's worship service bulletin can be found on the GSJ website, along with a link to this week's announcements and a "donate" button to make your offering. If you are here in person, you can share your offering in the service, either in the collection plate, by e-transfer or through our website - the QR code, found on the back of the pews, will take you to the website.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This is a busy community, and lots is going on. You will find the announcements of activities on our website and scrolling on the screens here in the sanctuary before and after our service. In the interests of time, I will highlight just one.

Congratulations friends! We balanced the 2025 budget with a little surplus for wiggle room for those last-minute adjustments...

And now, let's acknowledge the land on which our sanctuary stands.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Ruth Burnett-Cole

For millenia, Indigenous peoples have lived, worked, played, and worshipped here. They have stewarded this land and its beings. Over time people from other parts of the world came to this region and made their homes here. Together, Indigenous people and Settlers share their care for land, water, and sky. May we learn together what this land and its people need and work towards the fulfilment of these needs. This is our commitment.

LIGHTING OF CHRIST CANDLE

The season of Epiphany begins with the Magi from a distant land following the star to the child Jesus. They were the first sign that Jesus was a gift for everyone.

May we continue to seek Christ's enlightening spirit in the company of all people.
We gather in the light of Christ.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Where shall we go?

We seek the Holy One.

How shall we get there?

By asking those who have gone before.

By listening to the word of God.

By following the star.

And we'll find the child?

And even more.

But can we do that?

Yes! And we, too, are Wise Ones,

living our lives in love's way.

Living our lives...

And worshipping our God.

Alleluia!

Alleluia!

OPENING PRAYER

We come into your presence, God most holy, in awe and wonder at your great love for us all, no matter who we are, no matter what we've done. Open our hearts to your holy wisdom.

Help us, we pray, to share your love with the world, just as the Wise Ones shared their gifts with the Christ.

In his name, and in your love, we pray. Amen!

HYMN Joy Is Now In Every Place

VU 45

- 1 **Joy is now in every place,
Christmas lightens every face;
now be with us, in your grace,
O hear us, bless us, holy Jesus.**

- 2 **May the star that shone that night,
making your poor stable bright,
fill our hearts with love and light,
O hear us, bless us, holy Jesus.**

- 3 **Through the New Year let it stay,
leading us upon your way,
making Christmas every day,
O hear us, bless us, holy Jesus.**

- 4 **Now and ever may we find
your good news to fill our mind:
peace and love to humankind,
O hear us, bless us, holy Jesus.**

CALL TO HEALING

Friends, every day we are given choices –
the choice to be a friend, to be an ally, to extend a welcoming hand.
Some days we choose wisely, but from time to time, we inevitably get it wrong.

That is one of the many reasons we need the Prayer for Healing.
In this moment of prayer, we can practice the art of forgiving ourselves and others,
and being forgiven by one greater than ourselves.
So join me in this transformative moment.
Join me in receiving grace. Let us pray.

PRAYER FOR HEALING

**God of Light and Love, of sudden surprises, be with us as we lay our cares before you
in the sure knowledge you receive our prayers.**

**We bring to you our fears and worries, our hopes and dreams, and we pray for your
healing for ourselves and the world as we give thanks for each and every day of our
lives.**

**God of Hope, we confess that often we let the events and demands of our day-to-day
life crowd you out of our thoughts and our actions. Let us be alive to recognize the
many ways in which you bless and care for us. Help us to be people who reach out to
others in thanksgiving and in loving compassion, always ready to listen, really listen, to
the story of their lives. Where we find community, help us to enjoy the togetherness as
a present and the love shared as a gift that you have given to us. When we long for
community, guide us to those who will welcome us. And we give thanks for healing
wherever it takes place.**

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE

No matter where we are or what we have done or how we feel, God is there with us and for
us, giving us reason to face another day with faith and hope. Thanks be to God.

SIGN OF PEACE

One of the hallmarks of faithful living is concern for others –
we pray for better conditions for people here and throughout the world.
We seek to enhance love in our homes and workplaces,
and on the national and international stages.
It is in remembering this sacred duty that I say to you:

Friends, the peace of Christ be with you!
And also with you.

**Hope shines as the solitary star,
faith is the inner light,
You and I together mirror the Light of Lights,
and illumines the pathway home**

Listening for Wisdom

THEME CONVERSATION

PRAYER FOR INSIGHT

Breathe on us, Breath of God, and enlighten us with understanding. May these words take root and grow within our spirits. Amen.

GOSPEL Matthew 2:13-18

Rev. George LeDrew

Now after [the Wise Ones] had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

This is God’s wisdom from our ancestors in faith.

GIFT OF MUSIC

Amidst all the packages, wrappings, ribbons, get-togethers, cookies, and whatever is left of the puddings and roast beast, Matthew's story of the first Christmas turns suddenly dark and foreboding. Above all the comings and goings of Magi and shepherds, Matthew, and only Matthew, calls us to pause in our celebrations and listen to a voice wailing and weeping throughout the ages. There is an urgency in how Matthew tells the tale that calls the listener to stop and listen. And yet, we can see that something is missing. Part of the story has been left out that means to connect this infant Jesus to the long history of his people, Israel.

In a dream, Joseph is warned that the infant Mary named Jesus, "He who saves," is in grave danger. Herod is going to seek out the child to destroy him – the one the Magi said is born to be King of the Jews, the very title Herod carries on behalf of Caesar. Joseph is to take his family to Egypt, where the story of Israel began. Egypt, where Pharaoh ordered the murder of all male Hebrew babies. Egypt, where Moses was the only survivor of that first genocide to save God's people. We note the irony that Egypt is now seen as a safe haven as Jesus and his family become refugees, immigrants seeking asylum from the violence and danger about to take place in their hometown of Bethlehem.

It is no coincidence that the stories of Moses and Jesus have sustained the hope of oppressed peoples throughout the centuries: the hope that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus will act once again on behalf of endangered persons. Suddenly, however, we go directly from the Holy Family fleeing danger to receiving a new message to leave Egypt and return home. An angel of the Lord issues the "all-clear" signal. It ought to concern us when some invisible-hand edits the story – in this case, to remove the part we most need to hear: the story of the danger they are fleeing in the first place:

"When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

Rachel is the second wife of Jacob, named Israel by YHWH. She bears two of Jacob's sons: Joseph, who plays a key role in helping Jacob and all his children and tribes to seek refuge in Egypt from a long drought and famine. They arrive as refugees and remain as slaves. And Benjamin, whose tribe is later carried off to Babylon as servants and slaves after the Assyrians destroy the First Jerusalem Temple. Jeremiah imagines Rachel as the classic mother who mourns and intercedes for her children, praying for an end to her descendants' suffering and exile.

Matthew, then, reimagines Rachel wailing in loud lamentation for all infant descendants mercilessly and needlessly slaughtered by Herod's Roman soldiers in Bethlehem to keep the infant Jesus from usurping his job as King of the Jews. Rachel continues to wail in loud lamentation for all persons throughout history – right up to our own time – who suffer similar genocidal violence and brutality of history's endless succession of "Herods". She wails for the victims of those desperate to preserve their personal stranglehold on power: the Hitlers, Stalins, Khmer Rouge, and all who continue to brutalize the "others" who, in their paranoid rage, believe threaten them.

Matthew does not shy away from telling the whole story, as does our lectionary version of the story this second Sunday after Christmas. Matthew relates this tale to both connect the baby Jesus to the long and storied history of his ancestors and to foreshadow the rest of the story in his version of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It seems that Matthew means for us not only to hear Rachel's weeping, but to stop whatever we are doing and join in her lament – to weep for all refugee and asylum seekers who today, at this very moment, are in mortal danger, like Joseph and Benjamin and Jesus before them, and for all those who are "no more."

As Joseph, Mary, and the baby return, finding Bethlehem to still be dangerous, they resettle in Nazareth in Galilee. It is easy to imagine that as Jesus grows up, he will at some point ask why he never meets his cousins and aunts and uncles in Joseph's hometown. Surely, the story of Herod's slaughter of innocent children, and the adults who got in the way trying to protect their infants, is told over and over again among whatever might remain of his earthly family. Jesus, like Moses before him, was saved by the hand of YHWH, a survivor of this Bethlehem massacre, so as to save us all from a sinful, broken, and dangerous world.

Each child under the age of two represents a poem never penned, music never composed, a book never written, new discoveries never made. We will never know how many children actually died in Bethlehem in an effort to thwart the will of God's saving grace, love, and compassion in the person of Jesus, while more die in refugee camps every day all over the world. That is a lot of human potential, culture, and imagination mercilessly destroyed.

Matthew wrote this part of the story so that those children might never be forgotten – that Rachel's children might never be forgotten. And to remember, that it is humans like Herod and Hitler who commit such atrocities, not the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. Just as God intervened on behalf of Rachel's descendant Jesus, so God intervened after the Crucifixion by raising Jesus from the dead. Matthew, and only Matthew, reminds us that the light wood of the manger is the hard wood of the Cross.

We need to thank Matthew for not holding back the whole story. In telling us what happened in Bethlehem, we are called to stop whatever else we are busy with these Twelve Days of Christmas, to listen. When we do, we can still hear Rachel's lament; Rachel's weeping for those who are no more; wailing for all God's children everywhere. Above the din of our holiday activities, we can hear Jesus' voice calling us to follow and join him as he saves those who are still at risk. He promises us that we will do the works he does, and greater things than these we will do, in his name. This is the Good News of Christmas.

May we hear our Lord and Savior call us to take the time to stop, and in the silence, to listen. Here and now, listen. What do you hear? Amen.

Responding in Thanksgiving

HYMN A Light Is Gleaming

VU 82

**A light is gleaming, spreading its arms
throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love
is burning bright, living in the light.**

- 1 **When light comes pouring into the darkest place,
it hurts our eyes to see the glow.
Sometimes a word of hope reminds us of our fears,
our memories and tears. R**

2 When night is round us and every shadow grows,
a star is there to light our way.
It tells a story of Jesus who came near to say:
'God's light will ever stay.' R

3 And Jesus showed us a brighter path to walk.
He showed us things we hadn't seen.
Now we, like Jesus, can help creation shine,
and this will be a sign: R

4 So let us live in the brightness God has giv'n,
and let us rise to see the dawn.
We trust that God is here asparkle and ablaze,
- warming all our days. R

INVITATION TO GIVE

We are called to be the embodiment of God's Word. We are called to use our whole selves to care for creation, community, and the church. You are invited to share your financial gifts for the ministry and work of both this community of faith and Mission and Service. Together we will speak God's kin-dom into being.

OFFERING HYMN All Is Given for the Glory of God

(Verse 4) MV 34

All is giv'n for the glory of God.
Amen! Amen!
All is giv'n upon our glorious God.
Amen! Amen!
Amen! Amen! Amen!
All is giv'n for the glory of God.
Amen! Amen!

OFFERING PRAYER

There is so much that needs doing, O God, and we have no magic wand to get it done without effort, and no gold, frankincense, and myrrh to finance our efforts.

Here is our offering, but we also present our lives so that, in your grace, all of our offerings may meet the needs to which they are directed. Give us wisdom and courage as we seek to offer all that we are in your work. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Light of Christ

Gathering

Light of Christ shine in and through me,
Light of Love be with me now.
Take these hands, healing hands.
Light of Christ flow through me now.

PRAYER OF JESUS

Our Mother and 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, the power,
and the glory, forever and ever.

Sent by the Spirit

HYMN I Am the Light of the World

VU 87

'I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.

- 1 When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the shepherds have found their way home,
the work of Christmas is begun: R
- 2 To find the lost and lonely one,

to heal the broken soul with love,
to feed the hungry children with warmth and good food,
to feel the earth below, the sky above! R

- 3 To free the prisoner from all chains,
to make the powerful care,
to rebuild the nations with strength of good will,
to see God's children everywhere! R

- 4 To bring hope to every task you do,
to dance at a baby's new birth,
to make music in an old person's heart,
and sing to the colours of the earth! R

SENDING FORTH

We contemplate and consider the needs of the world, and seek to meet the challenges of that we encounter.

As we enter the new year, God will be with us in our times of challenge.

We contemplate and consider opportunities for service,
and seek ways to make real the hope that we share.

As we enter the new year, God will be with us in our times of hope.

We understand and accept the reality of grief and disappointment
and seek ways to support others through the journey of life.

As we enter the new year, God will be with us in our times of sorrow.

We anticipate and discover joys yet to be revealed
and seek to live with enthusiasm each new day.

As we enter the new year, God will be with us in our times of joy.

We share the confidence that God is with us each and every day.

Thanks be to God, now and always. Amen.

MUSIC TO SEND US FORTH

End of Worship – Beginning of Service

MUSICAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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