Glebe-St. James United Church

Advent One **November 29, 2026**

Please note: the livestream camera only captures the chairs at the front of the church. Sitting in the pews or at the back will keep you off camera. During the theme conversation, only the backs of children's heads are shown. – The Worship Team

Gathered by God

Preparing Our Hearts for Worship

"Sing We Now Of Christmas" (NOEL NOUVELET)

Welcome Pam Fitch

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to our worship service at Glebe-St. James United Church in downtown Ottawa on this First Sunday of Advent, November 29th.

My name is Pam Fitch and I am …

We're so glad you're here today. Whether you're a first-time visitor or a longtime member, whether you are joining us in person or online, we hope you feel at home. Please remember to wear a name tag if you are here in person – it's so much easier to feel part of a community when we can greet each other by name. Name tags are available at the entrances to the sanctuary.

We are an Affirming Community of Faith in the United Church of Canada - a place of faith, love and community. You are welcome here. If you are looking for a place where your soul can breathe, sit back and listen to the inspirational music. If you are looking for community and connection, this is a place of acceptance, friendship and support. If you are looking for somewhere where you can make a difference in your community, this is a place where you can help to feed those struggling to make ends meet. 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.

Announcements

Advent Book Study
Tuesday evenings, 7 – 8 pm on zoom.
Book: The Wall Between: How October 7 and Gaza Have Reshaped the Narratives. Contact Rev Teresa or Jennifer for more information.

GSJ Note cards are back. Inez has created a new four-card set featuring beautiful images of our stained glass windows. Cost is $ 15 per set. Contact Barb Coyle to order.

OMRA Grocery cards – order goes in on Monday. Please see Donna-Fay if you are interested.

Land Acknowledgement

Today we take a moment to say thank you. We are gathered on the traditional land of the Algonquin people. The Algonquin people have cared for this land, the rivers, the trees, and the animals for thousands of years.

We are grateful to live, learn, and play here. Let's remember to take care of the land, just as the Algonquin people have always done."
Let us worship!

Call to Worship

In God's house,
we are free to wear our hearts on our sleeves.
In God's house,
we may come exactly as we are.
In God's house,
we dare to hope. We dream new dreams.
We cry out. We call upon God.
In God's house,
all are welcome and all are heard.
So come and worship.
God is here. God is listening.
Let us worship our with-us God.

Hymn All Earth Is Waiting VU 5

1 All earth is waiting to see the Promised One,
and open furrows await the seed of God.
All the world, bound and struggling, seeks true liberty;
it cries out for justice and searches for the truth.

2 Thus says the prophet to those of Israel,
'A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel.'
One whose name is 'God with us', our Saviour shall be,
through whom hope will blossom once more within our hearts.

3 Mountains and valleys will have to be made plain,
open new highways, new highways for our God,
who is now coming closer, so come all and see,
and open the doorways as wide as wide can be.

4 In lowly stable the Promised One appeared.
Yet, feel that presence throughout the earth today,
for Christ lives in all Christians and is with us now;
again, on arriving, Christ brings us liberty.

Candle Lighting

When the nights are long
and the roads are hard,
we turn our eyes to the stars.
When the work is demanding
and injustice unending,
we stand together, arm in arm.
When fear looms large
and grief weighs heavy,
we cry out to God without holding back.
And when the dawn of tomorrow
feels far away,
we gather together to light the candle
of hope.

(Light candle.)

Like the stars above,
may this light shine bright.
May it guide our path.
May it inspire deeper hope.
Until God's promised day,
may it be so. **Amen.**

Candle Lighting Hymn We Light This Candle TLUS 55

We light this candle for hope.
Await the new life within.
May our hearts now live each day,
So hope can find a way, so hope can find a way.

Opening Prayer

Loving and creative God,
as we begin this season of Advent, open our hearts to the hope that you offer. Like clay in the hands of a potter, we come knowing that we are still being shaped, still growing, still becoming the people you call us to be.

Mould us with your love. Soften what has become hardened within us. Help us to let go of what keeps us from loving generously and living compassionately. In a world longing for peace, justice and healing, remind us that your light continues to shine and that new beginnings are always possible.
May this time of worship renew our hope and prepare us to welcome Christ into our hearts and into our world. Amen.

Sign of Peace

Hymn Neighbour, I am Your Neighbour TLUS 164

Neighbour, I am your neighbour,
we are in this world together.
Let's care for one another, uncertain as it is.

Neighbour, I am your neighbour,
we are in this world together.
I don't know all that you're going through,
but I'll be here for you.

Theme Conversation God Is Still Making Us!

Good morning, everyone!
I brought something with me today.
It's playdough!

What can we make with playdough?
(Invite suggestions: a ball, a heart, a flower, a little animal.)

Look! We can change it and make all sorts of things.
We can squish it, roll it, shape it and start again!
Isn't that neat?

In our Bible story today, we hear about someone who makes things out of clay.
Does anyone know what that person is called?
(A potter!)
A potter takes a lump of clay and gently shapes it into something beautiful,
like a bowl or a cup.

Our Bible story tells us that God is like a potter, and we are like the clay.
Now, does that mean God makes us all exactly the same?
(No!)

That's right! God makes us wonderfully different.
Some of us are good at singing. Some are good at running.
Some are good at making people laugh. Some are good at giving hugs.
Some are good at helping others.
And every one of us is special.
God is always helping us grow, learn and become the people
we are meant to be.

And do you know something else?

God doesn't stop loving us when we make mistakes.
God keeps loving us, helping us and giving us new chances.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent!
Does anyone know what happens during Advent?

(Allow responses.)

Advent is the time when we get ready for Christmas
and celebrate the coming of Jesus.

Today we lit the first Advent candle. It reminds us of hope!
Hope means believing that good things can happen and that love can grow.
We can help hope grow, too!

We can share our toys.
We can help someone who is sad.
We can give someone a hug.
We can be kind to someone who needs a friend.
Every time we share love, we help make the world a little more beautiful.
And that is one way we help God shape the world!

Let's put our hands together and say a little prayer.
You can repeat each line after me.

Dear God,
Thank you for making us.
Thank you for loving us.
Help us grow in kindness.
Help us share your love.
And help us bring hope to the world.
Amen!

Hymn Look Toward Christmas

Look toward Christmas! Advent is here:
Welcome December changing the year,
Whistle up, shepherds! Saddle up, Kings!
Chorus up, angels, flexing your wings,

Sing, sing, sing alleluia!
Sing, sing, sing alleluia!
Sing, sing, sing out the Story,
Sing about hope and peace!

Mary and Joseph soon is the day,
Ready the donkey, start on your way:
You are the chosen, willing to trust,
Joyful your burden carrying Christ,

Listening for Wisdom

Prayer for Wisdom

Gracious God,
for generations,
we have cried out to you,
and you have listened.
So as we turn to hear your Word read and proclaimed,
give us the ability to listen as well as you do.
Give us the ears and the heart to hear your words.
In hope we pray. Amen.

Scripture Isaiah 64:1-9 *(The Message)* Brad Munro

Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and descend,
make the mountains shudder at your presence—
As when a forest catches fire,
as when fire makes a pot to boil—

To shock your enemies into facing you,
  make the nations shake in their boots!
You did terrible things we never expected,
  descended and made the mountains shudder at your presence.
Since before time began
  no one has ever imagined,
No ear heard, no eye seen, a God like you
  who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who happily do what is right,
  who keep a good memory of the way you work.
But how angry you've been with us!
  We've sinned and kept at it so long!
  Is there any hope for us? Can we be saved?
We're all sin-infected, sin-contaminated.
  Our best efforts are grease-stained rags.
We dry up like autumn leaves—
  sin-dried, we're blown off by the wind.
No one prays to you
  or makes the effort to reach out to you
Because you've turned away from us,
  left us to stew in our sins.
Still, God, you are our Father.
  We're the clay and you're our potter:
  All of us are what you made us.
Don't be too angry with us, O God.
  Don't keep a permanent account of wrongdoing.
  Keep in mind, please, we *are* your people—all of us.
Your holy cities are all ghost towns:
  Zion's a ghost town,
  Jerusalem's a field of weeds.
Our holy and beautiful Temple,
  which our ancestors filled with your praises,
Was burned down by fire,
  all our lovely parks and gardens in ruins.
In the face of all this,
  are you going to sit there unmoved, God?

Aren't you going to say something?
Haven't you made us miserable long enough?

This is wisdom from our ancestors in faith.

Gift of Music

A Voice Cries Out, "Prepare the Way of the Lord"
text from Isaiah 40:1, 3-5; 7:14, music by Lloyd Larson

A voice cries out, "Prepare the way of our God,
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain made low." (repeat)

The glory of our God shall be revealed; all people shall see it together.
The mouth of our God has spoken it. The glory of our God shall be revealed!

A voice cries out, "Prepare the way of our God,
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain made low."

Comfort, comfort my people; proclaim the promise of our God:
God's name shall be called Emmanuel! The glory of our God shall be revealed.

A voice cries out, "Prepare the way of our God,
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain made low." (repeat)

Reflection O That You Would Tear Open the Heavens

Rev Dr Teresa Burnett-Cole

There is something rather unusual about the scripture reading for the First Sunday of Advent.

We come to church expecting to hear about anticipation, hope, perhaps a little Christmas sparkle. We expect to hear about angels, shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and the promise of a child born in Bethlehem.

But instead, we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah:
"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!"

It is hardly a gentle beginning to the season of Advent!

There are no angels singing. No shepherds watching their flocks. No star shining in the night sky.

Instead, there is longing. There is frustration. There is uncertainty. And there is a deep yearning for God to show up.

Perhaps that is not such a surprising way to begin Advent after all.

Because Advent, at its heart, is about waiting. But it is not simply the waiting of someone counting down the days until Christmas. It is the waiting of people who know that the world is not as it should be. It is the waiting of people who long for something more.

And if we are honest, we know something about that kind of waiting.

We look around at our world and see wars that continue to devastate communities and families. We see people struggling with poverty, homelessness and food insecurity. We see the growing consequences of climate change. We see divisions in our communities and political systems that seem increasingly unable to bring people together.

We know people who are lonely, people who are grieving, people who are anxious about the future, and people who are simply trying to make it through another day.

Sometimes we find ourselves asking the same question Isaiah asks:

God, where are you?

Where is the healing?
Where is the justice?
Where is the peace?
When will things change?

Isaiah gives voice to these questions.

And I think that is one of the gifts of this particular scripture passage. It reminds us that faith does not require us to pretend everything is wonderful. Faith does not ask us to ignore suffering, to put on a cheerful face, or to set aside our concerns because Christmas is approaching.

Faith gives us permission to be honest.

To understand Isaiah's words, it helps to remember the circumstances in which they were written.

The people of Israel had experienced enormous upheaval. Jerusalem had been destroyed. The temple, which had been the centre of their religious and communal life, lay in ruins. Many people had been taken into exile. Eventually, some returned home, hoping to rebuild their lives and restore their community.

But returning home did not mean everything was suddenly wonderful.

The rebuilding was difficult. The community was divided. Resources were limited. The future was uncertain. The people were discouraged.

They remembered a time when God seemed close, when they felt God's presence in powerful ways. Now they wondered whether God had abandoned them.

And so Isaiah cries out:

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!”

It is an extraordinary image.

Isaiah is not asking for a little encouragement or a gentle reminder that God is nearby. Isaiah wants God to break through the heavens, to shake things up, to make God's presence unmistakably known.

In other words, Isaiah is saying:

God, we need you!

Not someday. Not when things are easier. Not when we have everything figured out.

We need you now.

There is something deeply human about that prayer.

And perhaps there is something deeply faithful about it, too.

Sometimes our most honest prayers are not polished or carefully worded. Sometimes they are simply cries from the heart.

God, help us.
God, show us the way.
God, don't let us lose hope.

Advent makes room for those prayers.

But Isaiah's prayer does not end with frustration or despair.

In verse 8, we encounter one of the most beautiful images in this passage:

"Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."

It is an image of relationship.

The people are clay. God is the potter.

Clay is not finished. It is not fixed. It is something that can still be shaped, moulded and transformed.

There is an important message here.

We are not finished products. Our communities are not finished products. Even our understanding of God and our experience of faith continue to develop and change.

We are always becoming.

Sometimes we resist that idea. We would rather have things settled. We would rather know exactly what comes next. We would rather hold on to what is familiar.

But the image of the potter reminds us that God's work in us is ongoing.

God is continually inviting us to grow, to reconsider, to change direction, to become more compassionate, more generous, more courageous.

And perhaps that is particularly important for a church community.

The church is not a finished vessel sitting on a shelf, carefully preserved and protected from change.

The church is a living, breathing community of people being shaped by God's love.

We are shaped by the people who walk through our doors. We are shaped by the questions people bring, the experiences they share, the needs they express, and the gifts they offer.

We are shaped when we listen to voices that have not always been heard.

We are shaped when we recognize the harm done to Indigenous Peoples and commit ourselves to the work of reconciliation.

We are shaped when we make room for people of every sexual orientation and gender identity to participate fully and joyfully in the life of the church.

We are shaped when we respond to hunger, care for creation, accompany those who are struggling, and work for a more just and compassionate world.

These are not distractions from our faith.

They are expressions of what it means to be shaped by God's love.

And the shaping is never finished.

Perhaps one of the challenges of Advent is that we can become so focused on waiting for Christmas that we forget what we are waiting for.

We decorate our homes. We prepare our shopping lists. We plan gatherings. We rehearse familiar songs. We anticipate the celebration of Jesus' birth.

All of these things can be wonderful.

But Advent asks us to look beyond the celebration itself.

We are waiting for the coming of Christ, but we are also being invited to recognize Christ's presence among us here and now.

We are waiting for the coming of God's justice, peace, compassion and healing.

We are waiting for a world where no one is hungry, where children are safe, where people are welcomed rather than excluded, where the earth is cherished rather than exploited, and where every person is treated with dignity.

And here is the important part:

We are not simply waiting for God to make these things happen.

We are invited to participate in bringing them about.

When we offer food to someone who is hungry, we help make God's love visible.

When we visit someone who is lonely, we make God's compassion tangible.

When we stand alongside someone who has been marginalized, we help make God's justice real.

When we care for the earth, we participate in the healing of creation.

When we offer a welcoming place for someone who has felt excluded by religion or society, we become a sign of God's hospitality.

These may seem like small things in the face of enormous problems.

But perhaps we underestimate the power of small acts of faithfulness.

A kind word. An open door. A shared meal. A listening ear. A willingness to stand with someone who needs an ally.

These are not insignificant gestures.

They are ways in which the love of God takes shape in the world.

There is something else I appreciate about Isaiah's prayer.

Even in the midst of uncertainty, even when the people are discouraged, even when they cannot see how things will improve, Isaiah continues to speak to God.

He continues to reach out.

He continues to believe that the relationship between God and the people has not ended.

That is hope.

Hope is not the same as optimism.

Optimism assumes that everything will probably turn out all right.

Hope is something deeper.

Hope acknowledges that things may be difficult, that the future may be uncertain, and that the road ahead may be challenging. Yet hope insists that the story is not over.

Hope trusts that change is possible.

Hope believes that love is stronger than hatred, that compassion can overcome indifference, and that justice is worth pursuing even when progress seems slow.

And hope calls us to keep showing up.

That is the invitation of Advent.

Not to pretend that the world is perfect, but to believe that it can become better.

Not to ignore the darkness, but to become people who carry light.

Not to wait passively for God to act, but to recognize that God's love is already at work in and through us.

As we begin this season of Advent, perhaps we can hear Isaiah's words in a new way.

"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!"

Perhaps we, too, are longing for God to break into our world.

To bring peace where there is conflict.
To bring comfort where there is grief.
To bring justice where there is oppression.
To bring hope where there is despair.

And perhaps God is already answering that prayer in ways we do not always recognize.

In the hands that reach out.
In the voices that speak for justice.
In the people who refuse to give up on one another.
In the communities that choose compassion over indifference.

And perhaps God is answering through us.

The image of the potter reminds us that we are still being shaped. We are still becoming the people God calls us to be.

So, we have lit the first candle of Advent, the candle of hope. May its light remind us that hope is not something we simply wait for.

Hope is something we nurture.
Hope is something we practice.
Hope is something we share.

May this Advent season open our hearts to new possibilities, deepen our compassion for one another, and strengthen our commitment to making God's love visible in the world.

And may we discover, once again, that even in a world longing for light, there is hope. Amen.

Responding in Thanksgiving

Hymn Hope Is A Star VU 7

1. **Hope is a star that shines in the night,**
   leading us on till the morning is bright.

   Refrain
   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.

2. **Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,**
   giving a promise of safety and worth. R

3. **Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,**
   telling the world that the Saviour is born. R

4. **Love is a flame that burns in our heart,**
   Jesus has come and will never depart. R

Invitation to Giving

Advent is a season of hope, but hope is more than something we wait for. Hope is something we create together through acts of kindness, generosity and compassion.

As people shaped by God's love, we are invited to share what we have so that others may experience that love through us.
Our offering is one way we participate in God's work of healing, justice and hospitality in our community and beyond.

Let us give with grateful and generous hearts.

Offering Hymn Prepare the Way of the Lord VU 10

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Prepare the way of the Lord!
Make a straight path for him, make a straight path;
prepare the way of the Lord!

Offering Prayer

Generous and loving God,
We offer these gifts with gratitude for all that we have received.

Take what we bring and shape it into something meaningful. May these gifts provide comfort where there is hardship, nourishment where there is hunger, welcome where there is exclusion, and hope where there is despair.

May our offerings, our actions and our lives become expressions of your love in the world.

As we journey through Advent, shape us into people who carry your light, share your hope and make room for your love.
In the spirit of Christ, we pray.
Amen.

A Communion Liturgy for Advent

Invitation to the Table

Advent is a season of waiting.
We wait for the birth of the Messiah.
We wait for God's promised day.

We wait for the sun to rise on a morning when
swords will be beaten into plowshares
and spears will be turned into pruning hooks.

But our waiting is not passive.
While we wait, we will gather at this Table.
While we wait, we will break bread, tell stories,
and remember who we are and who we belong to.

So, church, come to this table.
Come and be nourished for the journey ahead.
For just as surely as the sun will rise, God will always meet us here.
All are welcome.

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of every tomorrow,
God of the stars above us,
God of the sunrise before us,
we gather at your Table today.

We gather here, hungry for a better tomorrow.
We gather here, hungry for your promised day.
We gather here, hungry for a glimpse of your Spirit.

So today we pray,
meet us in this holy moment.
Meet us in this ordinary bread and cup.
Meet us as we sing, and pray, and feed one another.
Meet us here, that we might be fueled for the journey ahead,
for we know that there is work yet to do.

We know there is joy to seize,
courage to summon,
words to speak,
songs to sing,
and people to love.

So until the dawn rises—
until your holy tomorrow,
we will gather at your Table
to fuel ourselves for this holy work of Advent.

As we do, we will continue to thank you for the stars that guide us,
for the community that surrounds us,
for the dreams that sustain us,
for the Spirit that holds us,
and for the bread and cup that nourish us.

What a gift it is to gather at your Table!

Until the dawn, we will hold onto this gratitude,
we will foster our hope, and we will pray the prayer your son taught us to pray

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. Amen.

This is the body of Christ, broken for us.
Jesus said whenever you gather for a meal, remember me.

This is the cup of blessing, poured out for us.
Jesus said whenever you gather for a drink, remember me.

Can our banquet hosts and healing pathway practitioners come forward.
The banquet is ready, the feast is prepared, come for all is ready.

Sent by the Spirit

Prayer After Communion

Holy One, until the dawn, until your promised day,
until the sun rises on a world that finally knows peace and harmony,
until all people know their love and worth,
until that day, until that dawn, until that holy tomorrow,
we will gather at this Table.
We will break bread,
and we will remember what it looks like for all to be fed.
Thank you, loving God, for meeting us here once more.
Amen.

Hymn People Look East VU 9

1 People, look east. The time is near
for the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the guest is on the way.

2 Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,
one more seed is planted there:
give up your strength the seed to nourish,
that in course the flower may flourish.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the rose is on the way.

3 Birds, though you long have ceased to build,
guard the nest that must be filled;
even the hour when wings are frozen
God for fledging time has chosen.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the bird is on the way.

4 Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim
one more light the bowl shall brim,
shining beyond the frosty weather,
bright as sun and moon together.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the star is on the way.

5 Angels, announce with shouts of mirth
Christ who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming
with the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east and sing today:
Love the Lord is on the way.

Sending Forth

As you leave this place,
may you speak the truth in love,
may you hold fast to courage,
may you be quick to joy,
may you listen for the angels,
and may you build each other up,
until we reach God's promised day—
when the lion will lie down with the lamb
and the sun will rise over all of us.
That is what we move toward.
That is what we dream of.
So look toward the horizon,
and go with hope.
Go in peace.

Sung Amen VU 968

Music for the Journey
"Sussex Carol"

End of Worship | Beginning of Service

Thank you to those who have joined us this morning for worship.

We invite those here to join us in Fraser Hall, follow the service, for a time of fellowship & refreshments.

Musical Acknowledgements

- ♪ This week's organ prelude is an arrangement by Douglas Wagner of the 15th-century traditional French carol tune "NOEL NOUVELET." The Dorian-mode tune is used at both Christmas and Easter and can be said to bridge the two seasons.
- ♪ The postlude is an arrangement by Dale Wood of Sussex Carol, an English carol based on a folk melody collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams in Sussex, England in 1904.

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