

Glebe-St. James United Church

CHRISTMAS TWO SUNDAY

DECEMBER 28, 2025

Gathered in Christ's Name

PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

Sarah Westbrook

What Child is this?

WELCOME

Liz Elton

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

Thanks be to God!

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to our worship service at Glebe-St. James United Church in downtown Ottawa on Sunday, December 14th.

My name is Liz Elton and I am

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, introduce yourself and invite them to join us for a time of fellowship in Fraser Hall after the service. If you are new or visiting and 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

Just a few announcements to bring to your attention.

Today, we welcome **Hilda Sabadash** to the pulpit. Hilda is one of our Licensed Lay Worship Leaders. We also welcome **Sarah Westbrook** to the organ/piano. Sarah is the Music Director over at Southminster United Church.

Men & Friends will be gathering on Tuesday, December 30th for one last potluck dinner before the end of the year. Come at 5:30, dinner starts at 6 pm.

January 5th: We will have a service here at Glebe-St. James. With Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole presiding and our new organist, Paul Grose, leading the music.

On **January 11th:** We will be joining in at Emmanuel United Church for the Southeast Ottawa Cluster Epiphany Service. The service will start at 10am.

Our next congregational conversation is scheduled to take place after the worship service on **February 1st**. Stay tuned for more information.

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

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"Today we want to 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!

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

As you can see the advent candles have been lit, the Christmas services have happened and now it is the first Sunday after advent. My name is Hilda Sabadash and Teresa has asked me to lead the service so she can see friends and family.

There are not too many of us, so please come forward to form a circle in the front. Chairs are soft, and you can place them where you are comfortable sitting. Whether here for the first time or sitting in the same place for the last 20 years, you are welcome here at Glebe-St. James United Church.

Please join me in the Call to Worship

CALL TO WORSHIP

In worship, we hear God's story and we ask,

"What did God do long ago?"

In worship, we hear God's story, so we ask,

"What is God doing, here and now?"

In worship, we hear God's story, then we ask,

"What can I do to respond to it all?"

Listen, God is speaking.

Listen, it may be time to act.

Let us worship our moving, inspiring, with-us God.

Amen.

We are going to stay seated for the hymns. The first one with the words on screen is:

HYMN O Come, All Ye Faithful

VU 60

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem:

come and behold him, born the King of angels:

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

God of God, light of light,

lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;

very God, begotten, not created:

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,

sing all ye citizens of heaven above;

glory to God in the highest:

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

See how the shepherds summoned to his cradle,

leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;

we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps;

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

PRAYER FOR HEALING

Emmanuel, God with us,
scripture tells us that you were a refugee,
but we love to forget that information.
We love to forget every act of gun violence.
We love to forget how many people go hungry,
or how many students do not have access to good education.
We love to forget the injustices in our world that feel too big for
us to face.
But you are a God who refuses to forget.
So today we pray: make it impossible for us to overlook the
stories of those in need.
Make it impossible for us to sweep injustice under the rug.
Open our eyes along with our hearts, so that the anger we feel
around injustice
might fuel a fire for action.
With hope for a better tomorrow we pray,
amen.

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE

Church family,
even when we fail to do justice,
even when we fail to love kindness,
even when we allow fear to override action, freezing us in place,
God still loves us.
So hear and believe the good news of the gospel:
On our best days and on our worst days, we belong to God.
We are invited into community. We are held in God's grace.
We are forgiven. And we are sent to serve.
Thanks be to God for a love like that.
Amen

**Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born.**

SIGN OF PEACE

At GSJ we make sure Christ's peace is shared with all those who attend. And this is how it goes. First you get moving, make eye contact and you place your hand over your heart and say "The peace of Christ be with you." And in return they say: "And also with you." You repeat that until your arm is sore. Then music starts and we sing

HYMN Hope Shines as the Solitary Star

MV 220

**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 To the Message

READING Matthew 2:1-23

Wayne MacWhirter

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of

them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Now after they 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."

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazarene."

REFLECTION

Hilda Sabadash
Words by Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole

Let's start with the obvious question, friends: Why are we here?

We've just come off a great festival of Christmas services, with music and candles and all the pageantry you could ever want. So we have to ask the obvious question: why are we here this morning? Most sensible people are just turning over in bed, having drifted lazily awake to realize they don't have to get up, they've already done church this week. There are tasty leftovers in the fridge, the morning is just getting started outside the window, and isn't it wonderful to punch the pillow into shape and settle in for some more sleep?

But not us! We slapped at the alarm clock and got up anyway, grabbed a bite of cold turkey on the way out the door, and made our way to the doors of our church. What are we doing here four days after all the big celebrations?

Mary and Joseph probably had somewhat of a holiness hangover themselves after the big event. They woke up that first morning in the cold stable, and the shepherds and angels were gone. Baby Jesus was fussy, and they were suddenly nervous new parents far from home with no relatives or friends to help them learn to manage a newborn. Joseph had to learn to change swaddling clothes, and Mary's aching body wanted nothing more than to rest in a real bed instead of a handful of scratchy straw over a hard stable floor. Joseph had to find food to keep his family going, and Mary had to face the real danger of childbed fever or any other number of threats to her and her child in a time and place without sanitation or adequate healthcare.

And what was the week after like for the shepherds? They had had a truly extraordinary experience while out in the fields—with the heavenly host appearing and singing to them—and then had left the sheep to go down into Bethlehem and barge in on a woman just out of labour. They adored the Christ Child, then left, and they probably asked each other the next morning, as they rounded up their scattered sheep, whether it really happened or was all a strangely vivid dream. The gospel says they told everyone they met about the miracle, but there was no rush of townspeople to the stable. Luke says that everyone was "amazed," but "amazed" may mean privately telling one another that the thin air up on the hillsides had gotten to the shepherds.

It's the week after, and all of us—Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and we, a little band of pilgrims gathered here this morning—have that feeling of being washed up on shore after a shipwreck.

What happens afterward is an endlessly fascinating mystery. The Bible never tells us what happens on the days after; there wouldn't be time or space for it. We hear of a big, important event, and then it's on to the next big, important event, and we have to try to imagine ourselves what happened the following week.

What happened after the angel stopped Abraham from killing Isaac? When Sarah asked how their day was, did they tell her what happened?

What happened after everyone got off the ark, and Noah thanked God for the rainbow? Did they all watch the sky for rain and think about how they were never getting back on a boat ever again, no matter what kind of voices Noah heard?

What happened after Lazarus was raised from the dead? Did he go back to work and terrify all his coworkers?

What happened after Pentecost? Did the disciples check to see if the tongues of flame had singed their already-receding hairlines?

It's a great question, because they all had to face the days after, everyone from Adam and Eve to Mary and Joseph. They all had to contend with the knowledge that, despite the wonder of God breaking into their lives, in some sense, the normal ways of doing things still carried on. They had to pick up the pieces of their lives and keep going, even though maybe no one else understood that everything was different, and nothing could ever be the same.

So let's ask ourselves the same question. What happens on the day after, the week after, the month after? One thing about people in the Bible is that they always knew that their previous realities had been shattered. What about us? When we chose not to turn over and go back to sleep this morning, what made us get up and come to church?

The answer may lie in one short verse about Mary soon after Jesus' birth. Luke 2:19 reads, "But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." There's something every person in this room has in common with Mary: We are seekers. We're not saying the folks at home in bed aren't seekers, but something inside each of us drove us to get to this place this morning, and it is the same something that allowed Mary to welcome the words of the angel with curiosity and awe.

The hunger to know what happens next in this journey with God can take different forms for each of us. Some of us came here overflowing with thanksgiving for a beautiful Christmas and a year of blessings. Others of us came here because we feel something is missing in our hearts. Maybe our souls are heavy with loss or fear, and we're asking

God, what happens next? The shepherds and the angels have left the stable—is there room there for us?

And the answer is "Yes." The greatest thing about the days after is that they are unwritten. They are a blank page waiting for our choices and actions to write the story. Take a moment and ponder the unwritten story of your days after. There are many possible plotlines, many questions unanswered in your heart that are part of what drew you to seek the presence of God in church here today. It's such a vital question in this unsettled time. We're all asking in so many ways: what happens next?

The question can seem vast and frightening, as indeed it must have been that first week after for Mary and Joseph. But for Mary and Joseph—and for us—the answer is right in front of us: in this small child whose presence, even as a baby, brings us to our knees in the beauty of his holiness.

We have known something that Abraham, Noah, and David had only glimpsed from afar. Each time we ask what happens after the big moment, we know that, whatever happens, nothing can take us outside the love of Jesus Christ. Whether the next moment brings unimaginable joy, heartbreaking tragedy—or what is more likely, a long string of ordinary struggles and humdrum events—there is something new and different from now on. On these days after, the world has changed, because God has come to dwell with us as a person, as our own Jesus Christ, who loved us through death and beyond.

So praise God for getting us out of bed and to church on this cold morning! Our curiosity about what happens next is one of the most vital forces keeping our spirits alive and kicking, no matter what life throws at us. There will always be someone to tell the story of the significant events, the days full of fireworks and bells and cheers. Who will tell the story of what happens after?

We will. We, as a community, will keep asking the question because we know that the best part of the story is already written, but always waiting to be discovered: that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

The offering is collected

OFFERING HYMN Jesus Came Bringing Us Hope

MV 33

**Jesus came bringing us hope.*
Jesus came bringing us hope.*
Jesus came bringing us hope.*
Hallelujah forever more.**

OFFERING PRAYER

God of strength and beauty, we present these gifts for your work in the world, trusting that you will bless them and us - for your purpose. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 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.**

Holy and loving God,
you are the one who paints the sky with stars each night.
You are the one who stirs our souls awake and invites us to dream.
You are the one who was born in a manger, and you are the one who meets us now.
So with gratitude and humility, we bring you our prayers.

Loving God, we have so much to be grateful for in this season. As we move toward the end of the year, we look back on the last 12 months with gratitude for every joyful memory.

Thank you for the winter snows and the summer sun.

Thank you for the moments of laughter and the moments of growth.

Thank you for the magic of Christmas and the joys of life in community.

At this time, we name our prayers of gratitude silently and out loud:

Allow time for people to speak their prayers of gratitude out loud.

Holy God, thank you for every beautiful and lovely thing.

However, in addition to our gratitude, God, we also look back over these last 12 months with painful awareness that life on Earth is far from perfect.

God, we worry for those who are hungry.

We worry for those who have been told all their life that there is no room in the inn for them.

We worry for those who feel alone, and for those trapped in layers of grief.

At this time, we name our prayers of concern silently and out loud:

Allow time for people to speak their prayers of concern out loud.

Emmanuel, when we look back over the last 12 months, it is clear that there has been abundant beauty *and* abundant suffering. Where there is injustice—where there is violence and suffering, bigotry and hatred—fuel a fire in us.

Show us how to care for our immigrant neighbours, our hungry neighbours, our male, female, and nonbinary neighbours.

Show us how to love as you loved.

Show us how to make this next year a little more beautiful and a lot more loving than the last.

With hope for tomorrow and the determination to make this world a safer place for us all, let us now pray the words your son taught us to pray, saying. . .

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 Hark the Herald Angels Sing

VU 48

**Hark! the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!'
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim,
'Christ is born in Bethlehem!'
Hark! the herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn King!'**

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see;
hail, the incarnate deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn King!'

SENDING FORTH

In a fearful world,
may you look for God's spirit.
May you reach for each other's hands.
May you choose courage whenever you can.
And in all things, may you remember
that good news is louder than fear.
In the name of the one who calls,
the one who sends,
and the one who journeys with—
go in peace and
be not afraid.
Amen.

SUNG AMEN

Robinson II

MUSIC TO SEND US FORTH

Joy to the World

End of Worship - Beginning of Service

MUSICAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LITURGICAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Much of today's Liturgy was written by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed |
A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org."

**We welcome you and thank you for joining with us this morning.
Please join us in Fraser Hall following the service for coffee and fellowship.**

Thank you Hilda and Sarah for being with us this morning.

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