

The Glebe-St. James United Church

Second Sunday in Advent

December 7, 2025

Gathered by God

PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP It is well with my soul

Phillip P. Bliss

WELCOME

Liz Elton

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

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to our worship service at Glebe-St. James United Church in downtown Ottawa on Sunday, December 7th

My name is Liz Elton. (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 two.

Our Advent book study focuses on Richard Rohr's *The Tears of Things: Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage*. The study will be held on Sunday's at 7 pm on zoom. We continue at 7 pm this evening. We'll explore chapter 7.

Next Sunday, December 14, will be a whirlwind of celebration for Joy Sunday. The service will feature the Children's Church Pageant. After the service we will celebrate James' time among us. Rumour has it that Judy Wolanski is making cake!

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

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Pam Fitch

As we gather here in this beautiful sanctuary, the cold of winter and a constant wind has descended on our region. A polar vortex is what the weather folks call it. This penetrating cold reminds me of the resilience, shared knowledge and enduring presence of the Anishinaabe Algonquins who lived and thrived here for millennia, prior to colonial contact - without furnaces or heat or electricity. We recognize that this sanctuary and our whole city stands on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Nation.

I was introduced to wilderness camping by my husband Carryl and I have some awareness of what it takes to survive in the bush. When I imagine surviving outside in this winter weather, I can't imagine what it is like for those who have no home but a doorway. No bed but a grate on the sidewalk. I feel astonished that they can survive despite all odds. I doubt that I could.

The cultural wisdom and values of the Algonquins rejects homelessness because in Algonquin culture, communities pull together to support one another. They know that in order for all to survive, everyone must ensure that all have a warm place to sleep and food to eat.

Our world teeters on the brink of chaos and lawlessness. We have much to learn from the Algonquins in surviving winter's cold. Let us never forget the vulnerability of our homeless or precariously housed citizens and ensure social justice for all by working with our outreach partners.

Let us worship!

CALL TO WORSHIP

Family of faith, God is at work!
God is healing and creating,
Redeeming and dreaming,
Calling and sending,
Listening and loving.

Yes, indeed, God is at work!
So may we worship our God who never gives up.
May we worship our God who holds onto hope. Amen!

LIGHTING OF THE WREATH

In a world full of fear, where do you see glimmers of peace?

We see glimmers of peace in the quiet of early morning, when people shake hands, when loved ones say they're sorry, and when the church sings together.

You are right. Even in a fearful world, hope is all around us.

Today we light the candle of peace as a reminder of this good news. May this flicker of light help us remember that even in a fearful world, peace is present. We only have to look for it.

Light candle.

Thank be to God! Amen.

HYMN We Light This Candle

TLUS 55

**We light this candle for hope.
Awake 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

Almighty God, remind us again that in the midst of our shadows you are bringing us peace, to calm our anxious spirits and hectic lives. Turn our hearts again toward you. Make us ready to receive your Son our Savior. Slow our pace, and give us the blessing of feeling your peace in our spirits. For we ask this in Jesus' precious Name. Amen.

HYMN On Jordan's Bank

VU 20

1 On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lamb is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of Kings.

- 2 Then cleansed be every life from sin;
make straight the way for God within;
and let each heart prepare a home
where such a mighty guest may come.
- 3 In you, we find abundant life,
our refuge in the midst of strife;
without your grace we waste away,
like flowers that wither and decay.
- 4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
and help us rise to fall no more.
O let your face upon us shine,
and fill the world with love divine.
- 5 All praise to you, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won;
and praise to God whom we adore,
with Holy Spirit evermore.

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 build peace 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.

HYMN Hope Shines as the Solitary Star

MV220

**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 Dedication of New Hymnals with thanks to Laura and Jim Richardson

GIFT OF MUSIC Jesus, Emmanuel

Words: Philip Dorridge

Music: K. Lee Scott

*O come, the broken heart to mend,
The troubled soul to cure;
With treasures of your grace,
Come to the humble poor.*

*Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
Your welcome shall proclaim;
And heav'n's eternal arches ring
With your beloved name.*

*O come, the broken heart to mend,
The troubled soul to cure;
With treasures of your grace,
Come to the humble poor.*

*Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
Your welcome shall proclaim;
And heav'n's eternal arches ring
With your beloved name.*

*How glad the sound, the Saviour comes!
The Saviour promised long;
Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne,
And ev'ry voice a song.*

Jesus, Emmanuel, come.

PRAYER FOR INSIGHT

Merciful God,
we need bread and we need laughter.
We need music and we need a hand to hold.

We need a chair to sit in and we need work to do.
But maybe more than anything,
we need your Word and a reason to hope.
So move through this space today
and speak to us as only you can.
Speak a word of hope deep into our weary bones.
For we need bread and we need laughter,
but most of all, we need you. Amen.

GOSPEL Matthew 11:1-11

George LeDrew

Now, when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

This is wisdom from our ancestors in faith.

GIFT OF MUSIC Thou shalt know him

Mark Sirett

*Thou shalt know him when he comes,
Not by any din of drums,
Nor his manners, nor his airs,
Nor by anything he wears.*

*Thou shalt know him when he comes,
Not by a crown nor by a gown,
But his coming known shall be,
By the holy harmony
Which his coming makes in thee.*

Thou shalt know him when he comes.

REFLECTION

Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole

In every age when God's people lose their way, human prophets appear to sound warnings of what is to come unless humanity changes its course. They may be humble, untutored individuals like Amos, the sheep farmer of the eighth century B.C., they may be learned public figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or wild creatures driven by some inner fire. We usually think of prophecy as foretelling the future – predictions of things to come. But the biblical meaning of prophecy is the declaration of religious truth, speaking as the voice of God.

On this second Sunday of Advent, we find ourselves once again on the banks of the River Jordan with John the Baptist. All four Gospel writers agree that there is no good news – no Gospel of Jesus, without John the Baptist. Jesus himself describes John as the greatest of prophets. John took his mission, which was to declare the imminent arrival of the coming Messiah, very seriously.

John feared no one, not even Herod or Herod's wife, who in the end arranged to have John's head. He was, however, totally devoted to the One for whom he came to prepare the way, saying to his followers, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals." It would be hard to envision John on the cover of any fashion magazine. This wild figure dressed in camel's hair would more likely be depicted as a cartoon image holding a sign that reads, "Get ready, the end is near!"

John proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Crowds from Jerusalem and the surrounding regions flock to hear John and to be baptized in the Jordan. Why do they flock to hear John? Perhaps they have become disheartened by the quality of their lives and welcome the call for change. Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan point out that the Biblical understanding of the term "repent" is deeply shaped by the Jewish experience of exile. To repent, to return, is to follow the prepared way of the Lord that leads out of our separation and back into reconnection with the God who made us and loves us beyond our understanding.

John is out in the wilderness – far away from the places of power. He sees the world through the lens of wilderness experience and calls to mind the fact that God’s people endured the wilderness – with all its confusions, ill-will, and foolishness – as they fled from Pharaoh’s tyranny. For years, they struggled with God’s call on their lives, often abusing it with their own disobedience. This is a man who won’t stop reminding people of the reality of faithlessness despite all that comes from God’s gracious leading. He risks the traumas the wilderness may bring. The wilderness is a place where death is all too close – where food is scarce. No wonder his staples are locusts and wild honey. Perhaps venturing into the wilderness to be with John reminds the crowd of their ancestors’ struggles, allowing them to hear John’s call to repent more as invitation than judgment – as an invitation to come home.

To repent doesn’t mean to simply be sorry. In the New Testament, to repent means to begin seeing differently, to begin thinking differently, both of which lead to acting and living differently. To repent is to change, but not for the sake of change itself. Rather, when we change, we start to live differently, because as we enter a new mindset or as we develop a new way of seeing, we become aware that our actions are out of step with God’s dream for all creation.

And what is God’s dream for all creation? The answer to that question can be found throughout Scripture. One illustration is that of the prophet Isaiah, who describes God’s dream is for the world to be a place in which peace and equity – rather than fear and hatred – rule the day. God dreams for the world to be a place where we view each other with compassion and with love, where all of creation is full of the mercy and the peace of God. Dr. King dreamed of the Beloved Community. Catherine Meeks, Director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing, reminds us that God dreams of community where we love one another as neighbours with all our heart, soul, and mind, and that God calls us to live into this dream, not next year, not ten years from today, but right now.

It is a desire that John himself expresses with the phrase that always comes after the verb “repent.” He does not just shout, “Repent!” and then stop there; John links the call to repentance with the “why” of repentance: the kingdom of heaven has come near. For those of us who follow God in the Way of Love, it is Jesus who defines our new way of seeing, our new mindset, and our way back to God. Deciding to try to live and love like Jesus is what Christian repentance is all about.

Could it be that our rugged, ascetic nonconformist was not yelling with a tone of dread and doom, but with an equally intense voice filled with hope? Beloved, what if we choose to hear John’s call – Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near – not as an ominous threat of impending condemnation, but as an invitation to live into God’s dream?

Even now, there are prophets rising up in our midst. Our youth dream of having a future in which they can enjoy God's creation but often feel that their dreams are threatened because of climate change and violence. They are demanding change to protect their lives and God's creation so they and their children may enjoy the abundant life God desires for them – that they may live into God's dream. The vulnerable simply can't afford to be indifferent, "and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6b).

God invites us all to dream something beyond what we can presently see – the suffering of migrants, of refugees, the homeless, the hungry, and those who have lost loved ones through acts of violence. These are dreams by which to set a course. God does not ask us if we are there yet, but rather whether we are headed in the right direction.

We, as children of God, need to heed the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness – the voice that reminds us of God's dream. We need to take the time to seek God's vision for us – to ask, "What does God want us to be and to do?" We need to choose one – just one, for now – element of our lives where we see the need for repentance and take advantage of the opportunity to change direction.

We who have glimpsed God's dream must now share that hope. Like John, we must strive to renew the hopes of an exhausted world. With practice, we can see beyond the mess and dream of a world in which all are ready for the arrival of God.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." – "Repent, live into God's Dream." This is John the Baptist's invitation for us to come home and to be the people God has created us to be. Amen.

Responding in Thanksgiving

GIFT OF MUSIC Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming

Words: Tr. Theodore Baker

Music: Trad. German, harm. Michael Praetorius

*Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As those of old have sung.*

*It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.*

*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 half spent was the night.*

INVITATION TO GIVE

During this season, we are focused on gifts – the gifts we find for others, the gifts we receive under our tree, the gifts of love and caring that are shared among strangers for the good of all, and the gift of the baby Jesus. Let us think about the ways that we ourselves share gifts of time, money, prayer, and commitment as we seek to enable the ministries that are important to us and support the partnerships that allow us to share in God's purposes beyond the walls of this church.

OFFERING HYMN Jesus Came Bringing Us Hope

MV 33

**Jesus came bringing us peace
Jesus came bringing us peace,
Jesus came bringing us peace,
Alleluia forevermore!**

**Jesus came bringing us peace,
Jesus came bringing us peace,
Jesus came bringing us peace,
Alleluia forevermore!**

OFFERING PRAYER

God of justice, as we offer what we have, we remember your promise to beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. May these gifts be used to build a world where peace and justice reign and where your love shines in every corner of the earth. Inspire us to walk in your light and to work for the well-being of all people. In the name of the Prince of Peace, 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.

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 People, Look East

VU 9

- 1 People, look east. The time is near
of 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

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.

Knowing that God the Source of love,
Jesus, the Love in Human Love,

And the Holy Spirit, Love's comfort and power,
Go with you!

SUNG AMEN

Robinson II

MUSIC TO SEND US FORTH

Jacaranda

Grant Horsley

End of Worship – Beginning of Service

*Special thanks to Liz Elton (Flute) and Stephen Brooks (Clarinet)
for their musical contributions to today's worship service.*

MUSICAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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