

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We lament current and historic injustices on this land. We live here not knowing the full story of the land and its people but seeking to learn more, and, by the grace of God, trying to walk a more hopeful and helpful path.

Call to Worship / Advent Candles

**Voice 1:** The prophets call, and an apostle writes to announce that joy comes from God.

**Voice 2:** *“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me...and has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, ...to comfort all who mourn; ...to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning...”* (Isaiah 61)

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice.”* (Philippians 4)

**Voice 1:** Grief, pain and loss are inevitable. But woven into life is the joy of living in a universe that reflects God's beauty. Advent provides time to nurture joy in our lives and in the world God loves. Advent calls us to share with others the good news that comes into the world with the birth of Christ.

**Voice 2:** Holy are you, Source of all new life among us.

**All:** Jesus Christ comes as joy to the world.

**Voice 2:** We join with all creation and lift our hearts in joyful praise.

**All:** We light this candle to glow for joy.

□ *Hope is a star (verse 3)*

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PWS&D Message ~ *“I want to finish school”*

The students at Neno Girls Secondary School in Malawi who receive scholarships from PWS&D are all children of God with unique interests and challenges. Yet, they have one thing in common: their families can't afford to pay for their education.

With help from PWS&D, a scholarship program makes education available to some of the most marginalized teenage girls in the area.

For girls, challenges are even more significant, with the cultural expectations regarding domestic labour and early marriage preventing many from pursuing higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> The inspiration and much of the content for the Advent services is from “Sing a New Song: An Advent Devotional” from the PCC.

A student named Caroline Mkapita shares, *“I am lucky to be here because my other friends dropped out of school due to lack of support. None of the girls in our village have managed to reach [the highest grade] and to go to college or university.”*

While another student, Lindiwe, expresses her gratitude, *“I just want to say thank you for helping me with my education.”*

This Advent season, thank you for faithfully responding to Christ’s call to equip children with the tools they need to build joy-filled lives and brighter futures.

### † Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

God of Light and Love, we rejoice in your presence this day, for you look kindly on us, no matter how we came to be here. You bring order from chaos and call for justice for the vulnerable. You turn weeping into laughter, promising life made new. You redeem all that appears lost, giving each one a path and purpose. And so we come to you in joy, trusting you to bring peace and hope into these uncertain times.

Generous God, we confess that our concerns are narrow, focused mostly on our own lives. Opportunities to say thanks or to offer encouragement slip by. Anxiety turns us inward, and anger can make us lash out. Forgive us for neglecting the joy at the heart of the Advent season. Turn our hearts back to you and inspire us with your love made flesh in Jesus Christ. Amen

In Jesus Christ, we are part of God’s new creation. God’s love makes all things new! Know that you are forgiven by this great love and find the courage to forgive one another in Jesus’ name.

□ **10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)**

### † Prayer for Understanding

**God of wisdom, shine the light of your truth on us as we listen for your Word, speaking in the Scriptures. Open our hearts to receive that Word which can change our minds and our lives through the grace of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen**

Scripture:

**1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24 [NT 205]**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

**John 1: 6-8, 19-28 [NT 91]**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, *“Who are you?”*

He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, *“I am not the Messiah.”*

And they asked him, *“What then? Are you Elijah?”*

He said, *“I am not.”*

*“Are you the prophet?”*

He answered, *“No.”*

Then they said to him, *“Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”*

He said, *“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”* as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, *“Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?”*

John answered them, *“I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”*

This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

## **Luke 2: 1-15** [NT 58]

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, *“Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”*

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, *“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### *Emmanuel soon will appear*

#### A Message with Ordinary Questions...

I have quite a detailed calendar on my phone. I has information about my personal life – such as it is – about Steve’s appointments – so we can negotiate use of the car – about the use of Knox Church building – one with birthdays and recently a new one to find a time for the special commission I am convening to meet and do its work. It sometimes feels like everything is planned and there is little room for spontaneity or whimsy. My routine doesn’t leave much space for the unexpected so when it happens it is a real treat – a blessing and a joy.

**When were you last surprised or shocked in your ordinary routine?  
What made the event so unexpected?**

Rejoice, for God is in our midst! Rejoice, for God's realm is on the horizon! Rejoice, the moral and spiritual arcs of history bend toward justice! On this Third Sunday in Advent, we proclaim that despite appearances to the contrary, good news is coming! Glimmers of hope remind us that life can be different. The future is open, and we have a role in creating the beloved community God desires.

Rejoice! After death comes resurrection – after destruction – rebuilding – after war peace. This is our hope as bombs fall in Gaza – hostages remain in prison – Ukraine is still in turmoil and the forces of hate and unrest live even in our own nation. It is easy to give up hope, and yet, despite appearances, there is hope that the world is being transformed by God's impossible possibilities.

Amid the oppression of the Roman Empire, Mary and Joseph await the amazing transformation of their family with the birth of a child. They know that something impossible is about to happen because they had been visited by angels months ago and now the angels appear again in full force to the most ordinary of people – shepherds. *Don't be afraid... news of great joy... the Messiah... a child in a manger... glory to God... peace...*

Not your regular night out with the flock that's for sure!

**I wonder why God sent messengers to ordinary shepherds in the field to tell of the great things happening – what do you think?**

The whole Christmas narrative has ordinary written all over it – that is, until God shows up. The story of the shepherds is no exception. It's another ordinary night at their everyday job in the typical place with their usual sheep. There's a good chance these shepherds were children or young adults watching over the flock. Shepherds of first-century Judea had no real standing or influence in their society. But the biblical story turns this on its head. The significant people in this narrative are those who hear and respond to God. They are the ones who are most important. God chose to send the angels to young people – to those without much voice – to share the incredible news of a coming Saviour. The world would soon know what was happening through their telling. The Divine came into the world as an ordinary, fragile, helpless human baby born in the humblest of circumstances. The scene quickly turned from ordinary and boring to terrifying and awe-inspiring!

*“Everyone wants a revolution. No one wants to do the dishes.”*

This saying is a reminder that God is in the everyday things of life. Tish Harrison Warren writes in her book Liturgy of the Ordinary, *“The kind of spiritual life and disciplines needed to sustain the Christian life are quiet, repetitive, and ordinary. I often*

*want to skip the boring, daily stuff to get to the thrill of an edgy faith. But it's in the dailiness of the Christian faith – making the bed, doing the dishes, praying for our enemies, reading the Bible – in the quiet and the small – that God's transformation takes root and grows.”*

We all want accomplished families, exciting jobs and bustling churches, but God meets us and chooses to meet us exactly where we are – in the ordinariness of our everyday lives. Part of the message of Advent is that God can come to any of us anytime, anywhere. The glory that shone all around denotes God's presence, and it's a place of transformation for us. This is the good news of our Incarnate God – Emmanuel.

**I wonder how we might respond to seeing Christ in a manger.  
Who would be the first person you would tell?**

There are three comings of Christ: Christ, who came as an infant over 2000 years ago – Christ, who will come again at the end of time – and Christ, who comes to us daily. Whenever Christ comes, our lives are infused with new meaning and given a new orientation. In turn, we take up the angels' song, glorifying God and announcing peace on earth as it is in heaven.

The words of First Thessalonians provide good counsel for those awaiting Christ's return. They also provide good counsel for those who assume that the historical process will continue for years to come. We must persist, and not lose hope or allow our spirits to be broken by the struggle that lies ahead. Paul believes that there is joy in the journey toward justice. Despite the destructive ways of powers and principalities – the perpetrators of injustice that oppresses the poor – ecological destruction – racism and xenophobia – hatred of immigrants – and corporate greed – despite it all, the arc of history tends toward justice. God's way of Shalom will outlast the scheming of moguls and demagogues. Rejoice, give thanks, and pray always. These attitudes transform our lives, opening us to the joyous present and a hopeful future.

God is with us – here and now – calling us to be the change we seek in the world – to embody the dream we've been waiting for. These practices of grace make each moment holy and wholly present to God – the ordinary becomes extraordinary and we can hear the strains of angel choirs in our daily routine. The omnipresent God is experienced as our companion in the here and now and this is heavenly. The counsels of First Thessalonians awaken us to the wonder of each present moment as divine revelation incarnate in the midst of struggle.

Oscar Uzin (as recounted by Henri Nouwen in [Gracias! A Latin American Journal](#)) says this: *“Be alert, be alert, so that you will be able to receive your Lord in your husband, your wife, your parents, your children, your friends, your teachers, but also in all that*

*you read in the daily papers. The Lord is coming, always coming. Be alert to his coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.”*

## **How do you stay open and awake for God’s appearances in your ordinary life?**

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote his short book Life Together as a guide for communal learning in seminary. In it he describes the importance of praying continually, saying: *“The unity of prayer and work, the unity of the day, is found because finding the You of God behind the It of the day’s work is what Paul means by his admonition to ‘pray without ceasing.’*

*“The prayer of the Christian reaches, therefore, beyond the time allocated to it and extends into the midst of work. It surrounds the whole day, and in so doing, it does not hinder the work; it promotes work, affirms work, gives work great significance and joyfulness. Thus, every word, every deed, every piece of work of the Christian becomes a prayer, not in the unreal sense of being constantly distracted from the task that must be done, but in the real breakthrough from the hard It to the gracious You.”*

*The Prayer of Examen* is a silent recounting of your past day to see how God was present with you in your possibly quite ordinary day. Taking a time of silence to reflect on the day is a practice of seeing God in the everyday. If you can, find a moment this week to set aside 5 or 10 minutes to replay the previous 24 hours in your mind, scene by scene, like a movie if you are a visual thinker – calendar item by calendar item if you are a more verbal thinker like me. Look for where God was present with you throughout an ordinary day – in moments of joy and kindness – or in moments of sorrow and confusion. Thank God for being present with you in all of life.

John the Baptist testifies to the light – he knows who he is and his role in the divine drama of salvation. He is content with his vocation as way maker – the one whose message prepares the way for the fullness of revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. Like John, we are witnesses to, and a reflection of, God’s light, testifying to the deeper truths evident in daily life. We are on the road – sometimes trudging what seems an ordinary and routine path through life, but the road itself is holy and revelatory of divine wisdom.

In all the seasons of life, especially in seasons of struggle, our lives are intended to be spirit-centered and animated by the divine. We journey through these seasons on the wings of the Spirit by practices of prayer, gratitude, and joy – hearing the angels song that calls us to be unafraid... to see and believe the great joy around us... to give thanks for the Messiah – God with us as a child in a manger... to take what opportunities we can in our daily lives to glorify God and seek peace... Amen

Offering and Prayer

This Sunday, the Advent theme is Joy. Scripture and song remind us to rejoice in Lord. Think of your offering as an opportunity to spread joy in God's world, even when the world seems uncertain. Rejoice in the Lord and give thankfully for Christ's sake.

**God of justice and joy, we bring our gifts to you in gratitude for your unfailing goodness to us. Bless these gifts and use them to create justice and bring joy into the world in Jesus' name. Amen**

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest, and enter our lives today with your blessing. We are lonely for you and the peace you bring. Draw near to us in friendship and faithfulness so that in this season which combines celebration in the face of uncertainty, we may know your presence and sing with all your people...

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guide, and show us the way to wisdom and gratitude. We are thankful for the kindness we know in friends and good neighbours, in warm houses and warm smiles, which hold off the darkness and fears for the future. Encourage us to reach out to those who need your embrace and ours so that together we may sing of your presence...

Come, Christ Jesus, be our hope and touch us with your healing and grace. We remember before you all those we know, and those known to you alone, who are living with loss or illness this season – those who face depression or discouragement – and all who will find it hard to be merry this year...

Shine the light of your comfort into their lives as we sing of the hope that dawns in your love...

Come, Christ Jesus, be our king, and claim your rightful place in our hearts. Our world is struggling to find the justice and mercy you call for. Draw near to our leaders and all citizens working for peace and justice, and those striving to mediate or contain conflicts. Encourage honourable action and co-operation on all sides. Give hope to people under oppression and to those living with fear or hunger day by day. Hasten the



day when the world's peoples will live as neighbours reconciled in your truth and freedom. For the coming of this day, we pray as Jesus encourages us to do...***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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

□ ***Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel***

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### Blessing

Go with renewed joy this day – energized to share that joy with justice and generosity in the world God loves. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the grace of Jesus Christ.

□ ***We will go out with joy***