

Worship on December 15, 2024 (Second Sunday of Advent)

(CCLI: License Number #3156883) (Welcoming Elder: Christine Tian)

Sunday Order of worship

We Gather

- Welcome and Announcements
- Responsive Call to worship (See the insert) (Light the candle of joy)
- Lighting the JOY candle – BOP 119 Hope of a star (vs. 3)
- Praise song BOP 126 On Jordan's banks
- Prayer for worship and Lord's Prayer
- Words of Assurance
- Praise song BOP 153 Joy to the world
- Sung prayer for illumination (BOP 445 Open our eyes, Lord)
- First reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20
- Second reading: Psalm 100 (KJV) (Refrain 2)
- Third reading: Philippians 4:4-7
- Sermon: **Rejoice in the Lord**
- Hymn BOP 113 Comfort, comfort you my people
- Prayer for the people

We Respond

- Offering, Doxology (BOP 79) & Dedication
- Song for the Journey BOP 117 Herald, sound the note of judgment

We Serve

- Benediction
- A Sung Blessing

Welcome and Announcement:

Responsive call to worship: (Please see the insert) (Light the candle of joy)

BOP 119 Hope of a star (vs. 3)

Praise song – BOP 126 On Jordan's banks

Prayer of Adoration

God of joy you are our strength and our song. You gather those who have strayed from you and welcome them back to your side. You bring healing to those who are broken in body and spirit, and accompany those who walk alone. Through your great love and mercy, you transform us all into more than we ever thought we could be. We will trust in you and not be afraid. With joy, we sing of your glory and proclaim your saving power to those near and far as our Creating Father, the redeeming Christ and guiding Holy Spirit.

Merciful God, in your gracious presence we confess our sins and the sins of this world.

Prayer of confession (Unison) *(Let us come to God with the prayer of confession in unison.)*

All knowing God, we know perfect joy only comes through faith in you, yet we seek it elsewhere. In search of comfort, we indulge our desires. In search of love, we hide from our faults. In search of approval, we spend beyond our means. Forgive us, O God, for seeking satisfaction in the wrong places. Help us turn again to you, our true source of joy, and guide us to discover what is honourable, just, and pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Heavenly Father, hear us, as we offer the Prayer that Jesus taught us: (The Lord's Prayer:) Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Words of Assurance

The scriptures say, **"Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."** The forgiveness we seek is ours through the grace of Jesus Christ. May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, be with you.

May the Peace of the Lord be with you. *(Let us bless each other with the peace of the Lord.)*

Praise song – BOP 153 Joy to the world

Prayer for children

Sung prayer for illumination (BOP 445 Open our eyes, Lord)

- First reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20
- Second reading: Psalm 100 (KJV) (Refrain 2)
- Third reading: Philippians 4:4-7

"This is the word of the Lord / Thanks be to God."

SERMON: Rejoice in the Lord

This letter is written by Paul to the believers in city Philippi. **4:1, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved."** This is the last chapter of his letter and Paul is giving the final message to them. When we read this first verse, we feel how much Paul loved the people in Philippi. He called them my joy and crown. Paul loved them so dearly and Paul was so proud of them. They were the greatest reward or fruit of Paul's ministry and his life.

To the most precious people, Paul said, **v4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."** Paul is not making a suggestion. He commands believers to rejoice. He didn't say when things are well, rejoice. When you are making a good business, rejoice! When your children are healthy and happy, rejoice! It's none of them. There is only one condition: ALWAYS. This means that rejoicing is a continual attitude regardless of circumstances. **Rejoice always.** This also teaches that joy in the Lord is not tied to any external situations. Joy comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ. So, focus on who God is and what he has done in your life. God is faithful. With his faithfulness, he loves you and cares for you continuously.

When we rejoice, this is what we ought to do according to Paul. **V5, “Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.”** Gentleness reflects an attitude of calmness and peace. Where does it come from? How do we become calm and peaceful? It is from the intimacy with the Lord. The nearness of the Lord fills our hearts with joy and it gives us strength to share what we have from the Lord with the people around us.

We are like a **cup (clean water & dirty water.)** If we have clean water, we can share clean water. If we have dirty water, what comes from us is dirty water. The close relationship with the Lord implies that God surrounds us and upholds us. This becomes our confidence and it provides us the power to be gentle with others. When you see someone who is not so gentle, then pray for them for their intimate relationship with the Lord. And when we feel that we are not being gentle enough to others, come before our faithful God.

We experience this stage of being anxious and seeking satisfaction from external circumstances. **V6, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.”**

Paul contrasts worry with prayer. The only way to cultivate peace and joy and gentleness in our hearts is to surrender to the Lord. In other words, bring our burdens and worries to Jesus.

Matthew 11:28-30, famous verse, **“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

Very very famous and everyone here has heard of this. This is the promise of God. Jesus promised that if you bring your difficulties to me, then I will help. Simple promise.

The question is, Who did Jesus make this promise to? Is it Peter? Is it Paul? Is it pastors? Is it who? It's for me. It's for you. It's for each and every one of us. Are you taking this personally?

I had a chance to talk to someone who had too much pressure and difficulties in life. So, I said some scriptures including this one. I said, this is the promise for you. Take it as yours. Claim the promise of Jesus. It will be yours. Then, she asked me, “how do I take it mine?”

So, I told her one of the ways we could have some tangible feelings. Write down the scripture on a piece of paper and put the date and signature, just like a contract. For example:

Contract form with the promise of God.

Matthew 11:28-30, **“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

I, _____, confirm that I have reviewed and accept the condition of this contract as stated.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you need more assurance, there are so many promises in the Bible. Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. Put your name instead of I. Make a separate contract with God. Make a folder for the promises with God. These promises will hold you up. This will become your strength. When you experience difficulties, hardships, struggles, open your contract folder and remind yourself with the promises of God.

The promise of God or the contract with God is like buying a house. When you buy a house, you sign the paper, contract. Then, you become the owner of the house. HOWEVER, do you really own the house at the moment you sign the paper? Many times, your mortgage holder owns your house. It's like **"already not yet."** It became yours when you signed, but not quite yet. You still have to pay the mortgage. When you sign the promise of God, it is yours, but many times, it's already yours, but not quite. The promise is on the way. Like you enjoy the ownership of your house, enjoy the promise of God for you. Make it personal. Whenever anxious feeling comes back, open up your contract with God. Personally, making a visual image helps me a lot to understand and to remember. Find your own ways. Whenever encountering challenges, it is beneficial to have things to hold on. Find your ways to turn back to God. To me, personally, using this contract image for the promise of God gives me great confidence and comfort.

Rejoice in the Lord. This is a command for you from God. But, at the same time, it is a promise of God that if you rejoice in me, I will take care of other things in your life. To make you rejoice in me, I will take care of everything else. Focus on the Lord and rejoice in him.

If you have that contract with God, if you take the promise of God yours, then you can be assured. Whether you like what's happening in your life or not, God's promise is sure. The Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour came to be with you and delivered you from darkness and from the power of death. On the cross, when Jesus Christ saw you, when he **held your hands < then picture >**, he pulled you out from your death and sin and darkness. He saved you.

Psalm 40:2, "He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure."

Another promise of God or the contract with God for you.

Through the ministry and promises of Jesus for us, we joined the victory of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:55, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The Lord is near. The Lord is close to us. Therefore, rejoice in the Lord. Joy is not the absence of struggles or difficulties, but joy is the presence of Christ in the midst of them. Our joy is not rooted in our circumstances, but in our eternal foundation, Jesus Christ.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

This is the message of the Lord for us today.

Praise song – BOP 113 Comfort, comfort you my people

Prayer for the people:

The joy of the Lord is my strength. God who is near us, thank you for your presence and your guidance in our lives. We don't experience happiness and pleasures every day. But, still, because you are with us, because you love us, because you care for us, in the midst of challenges, we rejoice in you. Open our hearts and minds. Help us know who you are to us and what you have

done and are doing for us every moment. With aching heart, you love us. You hold us. You cry with us. Also, you laugh with us, you rest with us, you walk with us. You are with us in all and any circumstances. We are yours. Thank you for being our God.

In this season of Christmas, as we wait to celebrate your first coming as a baby in the same body as ours, fill us with your Holy Spirit. Sharing with people in need is important. Sharing love and thanksgiving with our friends and family is important too. But, please help us not forget that the true reason for Christmas is Jesus.

We sing Joy to the world the Lord is come. O come let us adore him.

As we celebrate, we remember those who are in deep distress, misery, desolate pit. Please help them. In Ukraine and Israel, victims of wars, those who lost life and hope, those who had to follow orders. Deep sadness, confusion, and hatred. In the midst of difficulties, let them know that you are near. Let them know that you can start new hope. Let them know that you can make changes. Let them know that you didn't give them up. Let them know that you still love them and you still care for them. Let them know that your promise is on the way. For your promises, even though we don't see yet, help us rejoice in you and with you. Help us hold on to the hope on Jesus.

We can go on and on in listing difficult situations when we focus on the situations. Turn our eyes to Jesus. Help us focus on you and your promises. Hold our hands, walk through our circumstances together. You are our God and you are our help and hope and joy. Be with us. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Invitation to the offering:

We make our offering today with joyful hearts, anticipating our celebration of God's gift to us in Christ Jesus. Know that our gifts may touch lives in deep need this season with the joy we have received in Jesus' name. As we praise and worship God with our gifts, let us glorify him with all our hearts. Let the offering be received. *BOP #79, Praise God from whom all blessings flow.*

Offering prayer:

Just and joyful God, we bring our gifts with hearts that rejoice in your goodness to us, in Christ and in creation. Send your Holy Spirit to bless them and us with the power to shine the light of Christ into lives where Jesus can turn despair into joy. In Jesus' beautiful name, we pray. Amen.

Song for the Journey – BOP 117 Herald, sound the note of judgment

Now, it is the time for us to be sent to the world where God called us to be. As I said before, we are like a cup. When our cups are filled, it overflows. We share what we have with the people around us. What would you want to share with your loved ones? Fill your heart, mind, and life with the joy of the Lord. May it be overflowed to your surroundings. Stay close to the Lord and live with him in peace and joy.

Benediction: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the Love of God, our Father, And the intimate fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with us all, now and always. Amen.