

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Joy in Christ  
Luke 3: 7-18

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship (Responsive)

*The Lord, your God, is in your midst.*

**Let us sing out loud and shout our praises!**

*God rejoices over you with gladness and renews you with love.*

**We will rejoice with all our hearts at what the Lord has done!**

*With joy, draw water from the well of salvation in this time of worship.*

**God is our salvation; we will trust and have no fear.**

Prayer of Invocation

God of Joy and Justice,

We will always rejoice in you.

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 draw close to 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.

Receive our prayers and praise this day,

for you alone are worthy, God most holy. Amen.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Prepare the way of the Lord.

We light this candle in hope,

the hope of our coming Savior, Jesus.

**Prepare, then, the way of the Lord.**

Prepare the way of the Lord.  
We light this candle in love,  
The love that Jesus, our Savior, has for us.  
**Prepare, then, the way of the Lord.**

Prepare the way of the Lord.  
We light this candle in joy,  
the joy that we have in Jesus, our Savior.  
**Prepare, then, the way of the Lord.**

### **Opening Hymn #125: "Joy to the World" (V 1, 4)**

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
let ev'ry heart prepare him room  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

He rules the world with truth and grace  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders, wonders of his love.

### **Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!  
Let us make our confession to God.

### **Prayer of Confession**

**All knowing God,  
We know perfect joy only comes through faith in you,  
yet we seek it out in lesser ways.  
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 honorable, just, and pleasing in your sight. Amen.**

### **Assurance of Pardon**

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.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**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 the Evil One.  
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Responsive Reading**

Philippians 4:4-7

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

**Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;**

*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

### **Music Ministry**

Immanuel, God With Us

### **Prayer for illumination**

O God, our beginning and end,  
by whose command time runs its course:  
bless our impatience,  
perfect our faith,  
and, while we await  
the fulfillment of your promises,  
grant us hope in your Word. **Amen.**

### **Scripture**

## Luke 3:7-18

<sup>7</sup> He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

<sup>15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

### Children's Hymn #133: "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" (V 1, 3)

Hark! The Herald Angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise.  
Join the triumph of the skies.  
With th' Angelic Hosts proclaim,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King."

Hail the heav'n-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 man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the New-born king!"

### Children's Lesson



Christmas is a time of gifts. I am sure that many people here have some gifts under the tree this year. In some houses it might be just a few boxes and in others it could be a mass of gifts crowding the whole base of the tree.

One thing that holds true regardless of the number of gifts under the tree is that there are labels on each of the gifts that say who they are for and who they are from. Kids usually have a grand time going through the gifts under the tree and checking who they are for and who they are from

There is a story about one boy who loved Christmas. Every single day he would rush to the tree and check the presents there to see if any had been added. He sorted all the gifts and arranged them so he could keep track of how many gifts there were under the tree for his sister and himself.

One morning of Christmas eve the boy jumped out of bed, ran to the tree, and saw that his sister had one more gift than him. This really upset him, and he ran into the kitchen where his parents were and got angry at his parents because his sister had one more gift than he did. He threw a temper tantrum and ran to his room where he sat and pouted.

He got himself so upset that he could not enjoy the friends and family that came to celebrate Christmas eve with his family. He was so caught up in his anger that he could not enjoy the real joy that we get from fellowship and sharing with one another in the Christmas season. The true joy of Christmas come not from what we get but from what we give, what we share with others.

This is what John the Baptist means when he tells us that if we have two tunics, we should give one to someone who has none. Sharing is what we are called to do. If we really want to experience the joy of Christmas, we should be sharing those things we have with others. We should not be focused on what we get for Christmas, but on what we can give, on how we can bring happiness into other peoples lives.

By learning to share the glorious and wonderful gifts that God has given us we can receive an even greater gift – the gift of joy.  
Let us pray together.

Wonderful Father,

We ask for your presence to be with each of us through this season. For your Holy Spirit to be with us and to help us see the joy of giving is greater than the happiness of receiving. Father help us to see those who are in need and those who we can help and provide us the means to be messengers of yours with others. **Amen**

### Sermon

The season of Advent is all about both being in a state of expectation and a state of preparation. We are expecting the coming of Christ, the birth of the baby Jesus and for that reason we need to be preparing the way as we learned last week. As we beat the path and prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the King of Kings and Lord of lords, we begin to anticipate the day of his arrival. This is also what is happening for many non-believers as the time of Christmas approaches, as the day gets closer and closer, and their plans begin to come to fruition they begin to look more and more forward to the holiday just for different reasons.



In a sense we are all the same when it comes to Christmas. The most -asked question on the Sunday we meet after Christmas is usually 'What did you get for Christmas?' It is also the most asked question at work, at school, at coffee shops on phone calls, in almost every interaction that question will appear in some format. As we sit in front of the tree or are handed a gift we have a sense of expectation, after all we all love to get gifts.

This sense of expectation was the same two thousand years ago. The Jewish people who lived in the regions which were under Roman control lived with a hope of the coming of their Messiah. For centuries they had heard stories of the Messiah, God's Chosen one, which had been proclaimed by their prophets and were written in their Holy books. All of the people of Israel waited in anticipation of the day that the Messiah would appear and usher in the new Kingdom, one they believed would be filled with peace, prosperity, dominion, and justice for all of God's chosen people.

They had been waiting for so long though that every time a charismatic preacher, prophet or military leader appeared they would run to them and ask them if they were the Messiah come to save all of Israel.

John the Baptist was no different, many people came to him and asked him if he was the Messiah, but unlike many of the other prophets and leaders that had appeared before who simply stated 'no, I am not' John added some hope, He said 'no, but he is coming'.

John preached a different message than many of the other prophets, he preached both Jesus is coming, and you need to get ready. John preached a message of repentance, he wanted people to fill their lives with the purpose, to be prepared to meet Jesus when he appeared. John was building up the expectation of the coming of the Lord in those who listened to him preach, and a key component of what he preached was the need for the people to repent from their sinful ways. John the Baptist did not hesitate to tell people that they needed to turn from their life of sin and be baptized!

In the modern Reformed churches, we only have two sacraments, communion, and baptism, these are the two things which we have kept from our Roman Catholic heritage as the signs of our covenant with God. John's message of repentant baptism and the baptism of Christ our Lord are integral parts of our faith. We are baptized in the church as a symbol of our rebirth as spiritually alive people and as a sign of our repentance from our sins, it symbolizes the beginning of our life here on earth as Christians.

The Jews at the time when John the Baptist was baptizing understood baptism a little differently. For them it was a ritualized cleansing for those gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism. To be thoroughly cleaned from their heathen gentile ways they needed to be baptized and be cleansed by the Jewish faith.

They did not see the need for their Jewish brothers and sisters to be baptized, because they were God's favored people. The Jews at that time believed that they did not enter the world in the same sinful state as the gentiles and therefore they did not need to be baptized in repentance and rebirth.

Then comes along this prophet, John the Baptist, and he starts telling the people of the land something that is very different. He tells people that being born Jewish is not enough! He tells people that they have to stop their sinful ways and begin to live a proper life. He called for those people who followed him, both Jew and gentile, to take part in the ritual of baptism to demonstrate their repentance as a symbol of their giving up of their old life and the beginning of a new life.

John's message of Baptism and repentance given two thousand years ago was about the expectant coming of Jesus, the Messiah. He proclaimed that we were to prepare a way for the Lord. To make room for him in your life, to beat down the path, to straighten the road and remove the stumbling blocks so he can come into your life. He even called for us to be the ones who help others come into an understanding of Christ by living our lives as servants of God. Crowds came to him and wanted to be baptized, wanted to become a follower of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. However, there were others who were threatened by what he did and what he said, especially those who were already confident in their salvation because of their birth into the Jewish religion.

John's message to those people is the same message that many Christians today need to hear. John wanted the Jews to know and experience the power of God in their lives, the

same way Christians are supposed to experience the joy of having the power and presence of God in their lives.

John's message was meant to bring people from the blissful ignorance in which they were living into the true joy they could experience when Jesus fills them with the Holy Spirit, and they begin to live their lives with passion and purpose. With Jesus we get to experience the joy of living an abundant and everlasting life in the Kingdom of heaven.

### **Luke 3:7-9**

**<sup>7</sup> He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."**

John the Baptist does not hold his tongue and speak kindly to those gathered. He does not tell them their sinful nature is acceptable and that God still loves them. He does not say, it will be ok because you have gone to church your whole life you are saved. Instead, he starts off with accusing them all of being vipers. He warns them that simply being born into the Jewish religion is not enough. God can bring anyone into his kingdom and remove anyone from his kingdom that he chooses.

He does this because many of the Jewish people and leaders believed that just because they were Jewish meant that their salvation was guaranteed, they were part of God's chosen people. How many modern-day Christians are the same as these Jews, believing that they have salvation simple because they speak a few words, are splashed with a bit of water, and come to church. They do not really believe, but they have gone through the process, so they think they have the rubber stamp of salvation.

John's message to the Jews and to us is meant to stir us up, to remind us that complacent Christianity is not the Christianity we are called to live! We are called to live lives that honor and glorify our God. Lives which seek to serve God, to bring others to God and not just kick back and rest in the fact we believe we are saved.

John's message shocked those gathered, as I am sure it would shock many Christians today. The fact that they went to church their whole life does not mean they are saved. The fact that their parents and grandparents went to church their whole lives did not mean they were saved? The fact they had preformed the rituals and spoken the words did not mean that they were saved? John's message tells them their needs to be fruit from the tree, or the tree will be cut down and burned!

What is the fruit that John is speaking of is the question everyone wants to know?



### **Luke 3:10-11**

**<sup>10</sup>And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” <sup>11</sup>And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise**

John does not tell them the people that they need to go to temple more often. He does not tell them they need to memorize scriptures. Instead, he tells them that they need to be honest and generous people. Remember when I said the most asked question of this season is, ‘What did you get for Christmas?’. John is telling us quite simply that it should not be what did you get, but instead what did you give!



Be generous, it is simple. This is loving your neighbor. Notice he does not tell them to take off your only tunic and give it to a stranger. Instead, he is saying share what you have. Sacrifice those things which are a luxury so that you can help someone with a necessity.

Even those who think ‘I cannot do anything too help, I have nothing to give’, you have time. Most people are generous when they have an excess, many people here give of their time and their money freely. John is just telling us to look at our lives and see if there is a little more, we can do.

Especially as we are still coming through this pandemic, is there anytime you can give to help others. To visit people and have a conversation, drop by with cookies or coffee.

Just like the I Love First Nations people charity we are collecting for, you do not need to donate a full fifty dollars, even a few dollars add up if a couple people are willing to give and while we may not be able to provide something for everyone, we can provide something for someone in this season.

Mother Teresa once told a person concerned that they could not help, ‘if you cannot feed a hundred people, just feed one’. Can you help feed just one person, can you make a commitment to visit just one person or give just an hour a week out of the 168 hours there are to help someone in this community.

Every little bit counts when it comes to helping people. So, examine your lives and look at what you can give this year instead of what you get. Look at what excesses can be cut so you can help others with necessities. Ask yourself how I can stretch myself to be more creative with my giving of my time.

John begins by telling the people gathered that being a follower means being generous with those gifts that God has given us. He follows it up by telling them that they need to live a life with integrity.

### **Luke 3:12-13**

**<sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”**

**<sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”**

He does not tell people they are called to give up their jobs and follow Christ. That they are called to serve him 24/7 in praise and worship. Instead, he says live your life with integrity, do not take advantage of other people, basically to be examples of Christian life in all that you do and say at all times.

Tax collectors had a simple life in Roman times. They collected the taxes of the Jewish people and passed them onto the Roman officials. Many would add on a few coins to everyone taxes so that they could live a more luxurious lifestyle. Soldiers had positions of authority and could harass and coerce people with threats of fines and imprisonment. John was simply telling people to love their neighbors instead of seeking ways to take advantage of them, to live with integrity.

Francis Bacon told us, ‘It is not what we profess but what we practice that gives us integrity.’ We are judged by the world not on what we say, what we claim to believe or how we label ourselves. The world looks at you and judges you based on what you do. This is why so many non-believers call Christians a group of hypocrites. They profess faith and obedience to Christ and then go lives faithless and Christless lives every day of the week except Sunday mornings. Integrity means we are doing the right thing even when no one is watching us.

As Christians we should always be practicing integrity, whether we are at home, at school, at work, at play, at the store or at church we should be living our lives in a Christian manner. Living our lives with integrity allows us to be seen as Christ followers in this world and be the salt and light that makes others want to be more like Christ.

When we live our lives with integrity, we are also preparing ourselves of the coming of the Lord. It is a way of preparing ourselves to receive the joys and blessing that God will put in our lives. So, while we are being a little more generous this Christmas season lets also try to live our lives with a little more integrity.

John’s message about Christs coming is both simple and direct.

Do not hold onto your parents or grandparents' faith. Put your faith into practice. Know who Jesus is and start living your lives based on what you learn about him. John calls for all of us to live life with generosity and integrity, both are difficult tasks, especially when you do not understand who Jesus is in your life.

John knew there were people then, just like there are people now, who faithfully attend church every week, or maybe even multiple times a week. They hear the message that is given every week, they might even think 'wow, that is a good message', they hear the message, but they do not really listen to the message. They do not take it in and understand its deeper purpose as a call to them to live a life loving God and their neighbor. Sometimes they hear the message and share it with others without ever thinking to apply it to themselves. We all struggle with this, because changing our lives, beating down those paths and straightening curves on our roads is a difficult thing to do.

John knew this, he knew change is difficult and that is why he tells the people to repent and bear fruit. To quit being people who go to church and become the people who are the church. Be prepared for the coming of God by living a life that represents your faith every day, everywhere and in every situation both when you are in public and when you are in private! Be serious about it, its not easy! Turning your life over to God requires faith, it requires fellowship and study and prayer, and on top of that we are called to live a life with integrity that shows we are serious about our faith.

If we want God to be active in our lives, we need to be doing something in our lives that shows we are preparing and expecting him. We need to be the ones out beating down the paths in our own lives, straightening out, smoothing over, and removing the stumbling blocks from the roads in our lives and the roads of those around us. We need to be a person of integrity, consistent in what we say, what we believe and what we do. We need to be people who practice generosity in our possessions, our money, and our time to show our loves for our neighbors.

John also tells us we need to be honest with ourselves about our sins and repent from them. To work at changing our ways, with the help of the Holy Spirit. James says it even more clearly.

**James 4:7-9**

**<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**

**<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.**

Submit yourself to God. Draw him close to you, beat down that path to his throne, Resist the Devil not by your own power but through the power of Christ. This means we are called to live by our commitments to God and not by our emotional responses to our situations. When we know something is a sin, we should be turning from it and seeking

the Lord. When we have an opportunity to do good, to be generous, or to live with integrity we should take it. We are called to try to walk with consistency, even though we will stumble, and maybe even fall, until the path becomes smooth and we can walk with ease.

This is why John tells the crowds that he baptizes them with water, but the messiah who is coming will baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

### **Luke 3:15-18**

**<sup>15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**

**<sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”**

**<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.**

Baptism is a holy sacrament; it is a symbol of our rebirth in the Holy Spirit. When we are baptised holy spirit is in us when and we are reborn in Christ, it walks with us on the path and it will help us defeat those things which draw us away from God, beating down the rough spots, straightening out the curves and removing the stumbling blocks. Leaving us with nothing but a smooth road to the joy of the Lord!

This is the gift and the blessing we are anticipating as we go through this advent season. The one that is always at work within each of us. It is not always easy; in fact, it is often quite difficult to live our lives with generosity and integrity. To live a life where we are placing God first and loving our neighbour. It takes a lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of mistakes, and doubt, and hurt, but when we get it right, we experience a beauty and a joy that is like none other in this world.

When we commit ourselves to the lord, heart, spirit, mind, and body we are given the gift of eternal joy in his kingdom and that is the joy we are to be expectantly waiting for in the season of advent, while we are at the same time giving of ourselves to glorify his kingdom here on earth.



Advent reminds us that God came to this world as Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. God comes to each of us in our lives, and John tells us we just need to prepare ourselves and expect to meet him. Advent is a season when we prepare for Jesus to enter our lives and fill us with purpose, passion, and joy!

So, my final thought for you all is: What are you giving this year?

Let us pray,

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to joy.  
Lift up our heads from the dust  
and adorn us with your righteousness,  
that we may rejoice  
and testify that our Lord has come;  
for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.

**Hymn #128: "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear" (V 1, 4)**

It came upon the midnight clear,  
that glorious song of old,  
from angels bending near the earth  
to touch their harps of gold:  
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,  
from heaven's all-gracious King."  
The world in solemn stillness lay,  
to hear the angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on,  
by prophet seen of old,  
when with the ever-circling years  
shall come the time foretold  
When the new heav'n and earth  
shall own The Prince of Peace their king,  
And the whole world send back the song  
which now the angels sing.

**Invitation to 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.

**Offering**

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3) We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer.

**E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. [standrewspert offering@gmail.com](mailto:standrewspert offering@gmail.com) Please include your Offering Envelope # in**

**the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (eg Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.**

**Offertory 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.

**Closing Hymn #132: "Angels We Have Heard on High" (V 1, 3)**

Angels we have heard on high,  
sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
and the mountains in reply  
echoing their joyous strains.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see  
Christ whose birth the angels sing;  
come, adore on bended knee,  
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

**Pastoral Prayer**

O God, our Strength and Salvation,  
we come before you with joy and thanksgiving  
as the beauty of this season unfolds with starry nights and sparkling snow,  
with faces that smile and generosity that grows  
even after a long, hard year of pandemic struggles.  
With the kindness of your Spirit,  
awaken opportunities for understanding to emerge among those who have differed,  
and refresh our community and congregation with joyful anticipation  
that your gift to us in Christ can change everything.

Tender God,  
We delight in the joy you bring into our lives and neighborhoods  
through our life together in Christ, and through the love of family and friends.  
These gifts have sustained us through stressful times  
and we thank you.  
We pray for those who are finding it hard to be joyful this year,  
remembering those facing illness in spirit, mind, or body,

and those waiting for diagnosis or treatment, as anxiety grows.  
We pray for those who are lonely or in mourning,  
and all who have been touched by tragedy and violence.  
We pray for those searching for work, struggling with rising costs,  
worried deeply about their security.  
And we pray for those working to bring justice to the discouraged and defeated,  
and those doing their best to care for the earth you love, despite the challenges.  
Use us to bring joy to others through our friendship, generosity and understanding.  
We offer our prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our hope, our peace, and our  
joy. **Amen**

### **Benediction**

God the Father, who loved the world  
so much that he sent his only Son,  
give you grace to prepare for eternal life.  
God the Son, who comes to us as Redeemer and Judge,  
reveal to you the path from darkness to light.  
God the Holy Spirit, by whose working  
the virgin Mary conceived the Christ,  
help you bear the fruits of holiness. **Amen.**