

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Joy  
Third Sunday of Advent  
Philippians 4:4-7

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

*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 Adoration and 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.**

**Advent Candle Lighting****(JOY) Week 3 – The Candle of Joy**

Leader: Today we light the fourth candle of Advent—the Candle of Joy.

**People: We rejoice because the Lord is near.**

Leader: Joy is the song of those who have seen the goodness of God.

**People: Joy is the courage to celebrate even in difficult times, knowing God is with us.**

Reading:

The angel proclaimed good news of great joy for all people. The shepherds, simple and unseen, were the first to hear the announcement of Christ's birth. Their joy overflowed as they ran to Bethlehem, praising God and sharing the news with everyone they met. In Christ, joy dawned upon the world—a joy that darkness cannot overcome.

Leader: The light of joy shines in the hearts of all who welcome Christ.

**People: May our lives radiate the joy of His presence.**

**Prayer:**

God of everlasting joy, fill us with Your gladness. Help us find joy in Your salvation, joy in serving You, and joy in loving others. May the joy of the Lord be our strength as we prepare our hearts to receive Christ anew. **Amen.**

**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.

**Hymn #145: "In the Bleak Midwinter" (V 1,2,4)**

In the bleak midwinter  
 frosty wind made moan,  
 earth stood hard as iron,  
 water like a stone:  
 snow had fallen,  
 snow on snow, snow on snow,  
 in the bleak midwinter,  
 long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him,  
 nor earth sustain;  
 heaven and earth shall flee away  
 when he comes to reign:  
 in the bleak midwinter  
 a stable place sufficed  
 the Lord God Almighty,  
 Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels  
 may have gathered there,  
 cherubim and seraphim  
 thronged the air,  
 but only his mother,  
 in her maiden bliss,  
 worshiped the Beloved  
 with a kiss.

**Responsive Reading****Isaiah 12:2-6**

<sup>2</sup> "Behold, God is my salvation;

I will trust, and will not be afraid;  
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation.”

**<sup>3</sup>With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**

<sup>4</sup>And you will say in that day:

“Give thanks to the Lord,  
call upon his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples,  
proclaim that his name is exalted.

**<sup>5</sup>“Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be made known in all the earth.**

**<sup>6</sup>Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”**

**Anthem (Music Ministry): “Christmas Bells are Gladly Ringing”**

**Prayer for illumination**  
**(Congregant Prepared)**

### **Scripture**

**Philippians 4:4-7**

**<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup>do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

### **Sermon**

Brothers and Sisters, today we continue our walk through the Advent season as we enter the third week of Advent.

We began in the first week by lighting the candle of Hope - not hopes as the world defines it, but a hope that is rooted in the unchanging promises of God. A hope that looks forward with certainty because Christ was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago and we know that He will come again to bring judgement to all mankind and usher in His eternal kingdom.

In the second week we lit the candle of Faith – A gift from God that takes hold of His promises, trusts in His character and produces obedience in our lives.

Then now in this third week of Advent, we light the candle of JOY.

Not happiness.

Not optimism.

Not positivity.

Joy!

A deep, unshakeable, God-given delight rooted in our relationship with Christ Himself.

**Philippians 4:4**

**<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice**

Paul does not say to rejoice when life is good. He does not say to rejoice in the Lord when circumstances are in your favor. He does not say rejoice when you feel spiritually inclined, on Sundays and other days you feel like worshiping.

Paul says, 'Rejoice in the Lord Always!'

And as if Paul understands that our hearts will resist this command to rejoice always, he repeats himself, 'again I will say, rejoice.'

To truly understand what Paul is saying here we need to remember where Paul was when he wrote this.

He is not sitting on a beach he is not enjoying his retirement, he is not leading a church that is thriving and celebrating his personal successes.

Paul is imprisoned, uncertain of his future, surrounded by his enemies, and suffering physically.

And yet here in this letter that he writes to the Philippians in fact in the entire chapter to the Philippians all we find is Paul's joy.

The book of Philippians is filled with the joy in Christ, a joy in the Gospel, a joy in suffering, a joy in the faith, and a joy in the glory of God!

In this book Paul shows us something that we all desperately need to hear and remember every day.

Joy is not a result of the circumstances we find ourselves in, joy is not based upon her worldly successes, joy does not depend on us or on others.

Joy is the result of Jesus Christ!

The Reformed tradition has always emphasized this, joy is not primarily an emotion, joy is the Fruit of the Spirit!

**Galatians 5:22-23**

**<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**

Joy is something that God produces in the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit in that person.

Joy is the result of justification by faith, reconciliation with God, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, and an understanding and belief in the promises of God's Word.

This means if you are in Christ, joy is not an option, joy does not depend on anything in this world, it is not seasonal, it is not conditional, it is a mark of your salvation!

Another thing to note is that Paul says to 'rejoice in the Lord!' It's important that he does this because every other form of joy or source of joy that we find in this world will fail us.

If your joy is based upon your health, your finances, your relationships, your successes, your comfort, your reputation, or your security, then your joy will rise and fall each day the same way that the tide does!

But when your joy is rooted in the work of Jesus Christ himself, in this person, in his promises, and in his presence, then joy becomes unshakable!

Habakkuk knew this

**Habakkuk 3:17-19**

**<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the Lord;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.**

**<sup>19</sup> God, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer's;  
he makes me tread on my high places.**

The truth is that the world builds all its joy based on the circumstance it finds himself in, Christ builds joy upon himself!

And Paul tells us to find that joy always. That Greek word that's translated as 'always', it means at all times, in every situation, without exception!

This means you are to rejoice in the Lord when you were sick, when you lose your job, when your prayers seem to go unanswered, when relationships go through trouble or fall apart, when grief seems to overwhelm you and when fears grip your heart.

The command remains, rejoice in the Lord!

Not in the pain, not in the suffering, but in the Lord who is sovereign over all of it, who is present in it with you, who is working through it alongside you, and who will redeem you.

This is why James was able to write.

**James 1:2**

**<sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,**

Because God uses trials, troubles, tribulations to produce steadfastness and maturity in his people.

Joy does not ignore suffering, joy understands suffering through the lens of the Gospel!

**Philippians 4:5-7**

**<sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone, depending on the translation you read it might say gentleness, moderation, or graciousness. The idea is this that our heart filled with Christ centered joy produces a life marked by gentleness, grace, mercy and love towards others.

Why does this happen?

Because when your joy is secured in Jesus Christ, you don't have to fight for control, you don't have to get your own way, and you don't respond out of fear. Joy allows you and frees you to respond with the grace, mercy, and love of God.

And we can respond this way because, the Lord is at hand.

This expression can mean two things, both which are always true.

First the Lord is near his people in his presence always.

Secondly that the Lord is near in his return his second coming is soon.

This ties directly into this season of Advent! We can rejoice because Christ has come and because Christ is coming again!

We have a hope that looks forward, a faith that takes hold, and a joy that celebrates the present!

Paul drives home the point even further by telling us, do not be anxious about anything.

He moves from telling us to be joyful to telling us to leave behind our anxieties.

He does this because anxiety is the greatest thief of joy in this world! You cannot rejoice in the Lord and cling to your fears at the same time.

Jesus Christ himself said.

**Matthew 6:31-34**

**<sup>31</sup>Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**

**<sup>34</sup>"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**

The Bible does not tell us to ignore anxiety, it confronts it with the truth!

God knows you!

God cares for you!

God rules over all things!

God is near!

Paul then offers the alternative to anxiety, prayer.

**Philippians 4:6**

**<sup>6</sup>do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

Notice how the advice of Paul goes against the advice of the world.

Anxiety makes us ask: what if, prayer says: God will

Anxiety makes us look inward, prayer makes us look upward!

Anxiety desires to assume control, prayer submits control to the Lord!

Anxiety always wants to imagine the worst possible, prayer remembers the promises of God! Paul says 'pray', and this is crucial in our world, and you'll notice that Paul does not say pray desperately, or pray fearfully.

Instead he says 'pray with Thanksgiving!'

Pray with Thanksgiving because we know that God has always been faithful in the past, God is always faithful in the present, and God will always be faithful in the future!

Our Thanksgiving fuels our joy. A thankful heart cannot be an anxious heart!

Paul concludes with:

**Philippians 4:4-7**

**<sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

It is not a peace of circumstances that we find ourselves in, it is not a peace that denies the troubles and trials and tribulations we're going through, it is not a peace meant to distract us from what's happening in this world.

It is the peace of God! A supernatural peace! A peace that does not make sense to this world!

A peace that protects your heart, is a peace that protects your mind! A peace that is rooted in your faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Now that you know what joy is meant to be in this season of Advent, you might be asking yourselves how can you live out this joy each and every day?

Because if we're being honest with ourselves, when many believers hear this command to 'rejoice in the Lord always' they quietly respond with:

But I don't feel joyful

I'm overwhelmed

I'm exhausted

I'm grieving

I'm anxious

We have to understand, Paul is not telling us to pretend to be joyful. He is calling for us to fully embrace the joy that already belongs to us in our Savior Jesus Christ!

So as Christians, we need to be aware of those things which will seek to steal our joy. There are three primary ways that joy is stolen from Christians in this world: circumstances, sin, and self-reliance.

Probably the easiest for us to understand is circumstances, it's the most obvious.

We struggle to find joy in our lives, when life disappoints us, when our plans fall apart, when people hurt us, when we find ourselves suffering, or when grief overwhelms!

But if our joy is rooted in Christ it is untouchable by the circumstances.

Jesus said:

**John 16:22**

**<sup>22</sup> So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.**

No one can take our joy from us because the joy that we have is rooted in Jesus Christ's Resurrection and His Reign.

In this world our circumstances can change, Christ does not!

The second biggest challenge to joy in this world is sin! Sin destroys joy.

David knew this, after his sinful relationship with Bathsheba he prayed:

**Psalm 51:10-12**

**<sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.**

**<sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**

**<sup>12</sup>Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

Notice that David didn't pray to restore his salvation, he didn't lose that.

Instead, he prayed to restore the joy! He prayed to restore the joy because sin had clouded over his view of Christ.

Sin interferes with your relationship with God, when you cherish sin, when you refuse repentance, when you hide in the darkness of this world, joy Withers!

If you find yourself struggling to find joy in the world today ask yourself, is there some unconfessed sin I have that is blocking my fellowship with Christ?

Not all sorrow is the result of sin, but sometimes the joylessness we feel in this world is!

And the way to find that joy is always the same: repentance, confession, forgiveness, and restored fellowship with God!

The third way in which joy is drained from us in this world is perhaps the most subtle of the three, self-reliance!

We lose joy when we believe: I need to be in control of this, I need to fix this, it depends upon me!

The reality is that self-reliance always leads to anxiety, because we were never designed to carry the weight of sovereignty and rulership.

Only God was meant to be sovereign, only God was meant to rule over all things, and when we try to rule over ourselves and the world around us, our joy collapses.

This is why Peter wrote:

**1 Peter 5:6-10**

**<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. <sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.**

That word 'cast' means to transfer, take all the things from this world that cause anxiety and give them over to the Lord.

Our joy returns when the burden is placed back into the hands of God!

And that is the Joy that we are called to share with the world not just in the season of Advent but everyday of our lives.

Not a loud, forced, artificial happiness of religion, but a deep, quiet, centered joy in Christ.

When the world looks at the faithful it should see someone who is suffering but joyful, grieving but hopeful, pressured but peaceful, struggling but praising their God.

This is what Paul meant when he said, **<sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.'**

Your joy in all things is your testimony to the world that Christ is real and present in your life.

So go and show the world what Christian joy really is!

It is not holiday cheer, Christmas spirit, happiness and celebration. It is not temporary, fragile, dependant on life circumstances, driven by our emotions or easily altered.

It is a Biblical joy that is eternal, secure, rooted in Christ, secured by the Spirit and strengthened in our sufferings.

The world says, 'Things are going good, therefore I rejoice!', the Christian says, 'God is good, therefore I rejoice.'

Advent Joy is all about celebrating when Jesus came and knowing that he is coming again.

So rejoice in the Lord your God.

Turn your heart to Christ every day. Remember the promises of the Gospel, sing of God's love, and study the truth of God's Word.

Talk to God every day in prayer. In the big things that are happening in your life, and in the little things. When things go wrong and when things go right., Talk to God about your small frustrations, your daily needs, your fears, the decisions you need to make, and the relationships you have.

Make talking to God an integral part of your life. Hand him your burdens and let your joy increase.

Give thanks to God in all you do. God has been good, God is good and God will be good.

You might have heard the expression, 'God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.'

Live your life knowing that, believing that and thanking God for his goodness, even if you do not understand the circumstances you are in.

Again look how Paul concludes today's Scripture:

**Philippians 4:7**

**<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

God's peace will Guard you heart, that is a military term, it means God will stand watch over your heart, protect it from assault and attacks.

It means that God's peace is literally a fortress around your heart, Joy and peace go hand in hand, they cannot be separated, the presence of one strengthens the other.

So, ask yourself: Where is your joy today? Is it in the fading and failing things of this world or is it in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

In the season of Advent each week builds upon the last.

Hope looked forward to the promises of God.

Faith takes hold of the hope and brings it into our present lives.  
Joy celebrates that those promises which we know to be true.

Joy is not the end.

We have another week of Advent next week.

When we will see how, hope, faith and joy allow our love to pour out for our God and upon the world around us.

Brothers and Sisters,

If you belong to Christ, let His joy wash over you and go out and be the Salt and Light of God's Word in this dark and broken world.

Let us pray,

**Our High Priest and Shepherd**

We thank you with our whole heart,  
O beloved Father,  
for the precious blood of your dear Son,  
which he shed for our sake,  
and by which you daily cleanse, quicken, and sanctify us  
in your holy Church,  
and make us partakers of your divine nature.  
We thank you for the great and unspeakable love,  
though we were not worthy of it,  
when you redeemed us by your own Son,  
who is our High priest and Mediator,  
the true Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep of his flock,  
who now sits on your right hand  
and intercedes for us.  
O good and faithful God, Friend of all mankind,  
give us your grace and your great compassion,  
that we may praise you with your Son and the Holy Spirit  
in every act of our lives evermore.  
Amen.

*Source: Unknown, attributed to St. Augustine (d. 430)*

**Invitation to Offering**

**Offering****Offertory Prayer****(Congregant Prepared)****Closing Hymn #147: "Angels We Have Heard On High" (V 1,2,4)**

Angels we have heard on high,  
 Sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
 And the mountains in reply  
 Echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain:

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
 Why your joyous strains prolong?  
 What the gladsome tidings be  
 Which inspire your heavn'ly song? [Refrain]

See him in a manger laid,  
 Whom the choirs of angels praise.  
 Mary, Joseph, lend your aid  
 While our hearts in love we raise. [Refrain]

**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.**