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ADVENT 3B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Third Sunday in Advent - Year B
13th December 2026

Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

106 STF – God whose almighty word OR

176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel OR

183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Hymn:

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart OR

657 STF – You give rest to the weary

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains OR

228 STF – Hail to the Lord's anointed

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come! OR

162 STF – The prophets' voice comes down the years

Blessing

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Call to worship

This is the season of your coming,
Come Lord Jesus.

This is the season of our getting ready,
Guide us, Lord Jesus.

This is the season of the Prince of Peace,
Inspire our peace, Lord Jesus,

Amen.[1]

Hymn:
106 STF – God whose almighty word OR
176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness

Opening Prayers

Light of the world,
In the midst of this Advent season we give thanks that you are not a God who loves us from a distance, you are not a God of high-heavens and military power,
Rather, you are a God of presence, of earthly-ordinariness and of poverty.

Prince of peace,
In a world of much injustice, fighting, disaster and pain,
Shine your Christmas light, we pray.

Lord of love,
In a world where many are living in poverty, and the corridors of power are a closed shop, run by a wealthy, privileged few,
Remind us of the miracle of Christmas again.

Forgive us for the times when we play our part in supporting injustice and propping up systems of oppression.
Thank you that, by your grace, we are already forgiven, loved and set free.

Help us to play our part in bringing about a Kingdom of peace, of love, of relationship and healing,
In Jesus' name,

Amen.[2]

We say together the Lord's Prayer

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[1] Call to worship written by Tim Baker

[2] Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

All Age Talk

Resources: a long coat, small squares of newspaper, marker pens, safety pins or glue dots.

Many centuries before Jesus was born, a prophet named Isaiah spoke a bold message about the Messiah who would come and transform the world with a powerful message of good news. This was especially important for people who were finding life hard or struggling in all kinds of ways. He mentioned those who were worried and upset, people who felt trapped or like prisoners, and those who were grieving, and said the coming of Jesus would make a big difference in their lives. That in the middle of all the hurt and pain they were feeling, Jesus could bring gladness and justice to make things right again.

Some of us might be feeling like this today and need to know that Jesus came for someone just like us. It can be very hard when we feel sad or frustrated to know God's goodness, let alone want to rejoice, but the prophet Isaiah says this is possible. Isaiah said these words:

"He dressed me in the clothes of salvation. He put the victory coat on me."

So to demonstrate this promise that God has made to us we're going to decorate a coat together. On the pieces of newspaper you're invited to write a word of thanks or praise to God and then come and attach it to the coat. *(Either you or a volunteer can wear the coat whilst this happens. Give people time to complete the activity. Once it's finished take time to walk around and let people see all the various words and phrases on it).*

This coat that we've created brings to life the words that Isaiah spoke and the promise of Jesus, the Messiah, God's own son, who would come with words of good news for each and every one of us. We can have hope, even when life is difficult as it might be for some of us at this time, that God is not distant, but with us. Let us say together these words from Isaiah and would it be our prayer at this time:

"the Lord God will make goodness and praise grow throughout the nations."

Amen.[3]

Hymn:
180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel OR
183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Hymn:
404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart OR
657 STF – You give rest to the weary

[3] All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

Reflections on the readings

There is a particular kind of pressure that can arrive at Christmas: the pressure to be happy, the expectation that this is a joyful time of year, full of celebration, family, friendship and good things to eat. And for many people, perhaps that will be the experience of the next few weeks. But for many of us, Christmas can be complicated.

Perhaps someone we love is no longer with us.
Perhaps a relationship has broken down.
Perhaps money is tight, work is difficult, or the future feels uncertain.
Perhaps we look at the world around us and wonder how we can possibly celebrate when so many people are suffering.

And so, when we hear Paul's words in today's reading, "Rejoice always", we might be forgiven for wondering whether he has quite understood the world we live in.

Always? Really? Even now?

What do we do with that? Perhaps the answer begins with understanding what Christian joy actually means, because joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is often connected to our circumstances. We are happy when things go well, when we feel secure, when the people we love are doing well. Joy can exist alongside very different feelings. We can be grieving and grateful, frightened and hopeful. We can be angry about injustice and still believe that a better world is possible.

Christian joy is not the insistence that everything is fine, it is the conviction that, even when everything is not fine, goodness is still possible and love is still at work, and the

Isaiah gives us a picture of what that joy might look like. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me," the prophet declares, "because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the oppressed." The prophet describes a radical social justice agenda: good news for the poor, freedom for the captives, comfort for those who mourn, repair for ruined places, a community rebuilt after devastation.

This is not a picture of people being told to cheer up and look on the bright side: it is a picture of a world being changed. The poor are not simply encouraged to feel better about being poor. The oppressed are not told to accept their circumstances. Those who mourn are not told to forget their grief. Instead, God promises something that reaches into the realities of their lives: justice.

When Jesus begins his public ministry, he draws on these very words from Isaiah to describe the work he has come to do. Perhaps this tells us something important about Advent: we are not simply preparing to celebrate the arrival of a baby, we are preparing to welcome the one whose life will challenge the powerful, lift up the overlooked, and offer a radically different vision of what human life can be. And preparing to get involved in that radical transformation of our own lives, of the lives of those around us, and of the whole world, in Jesus' name.

If we want to understand the joy of Christmas, perhaps we need to begin by asking what kind of world the Christ-child comes to transform, and whether we are willing to be part of that transformation.

Psalm 126 offers us another perspective. It is a song of joy, remembering a time when God restored the fortunes of the people: their mouths were filled with laughter, their tongues with shouts of joy. But then comes a striking image: "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy."

It is a beautiful promise, but it is not a promise that tears are somehow unnecessary. The tears are part of the story.

Anyone who has ever tried to make a difference in the world knows something about that. You can work for justice and still see injustice everywhere. You can care deeply for someone and still be unable to take away their pain. You can invest in a community and wonder whether anything is changing. You can pray for peace and wake up to another morning of conflict. Sometimes all we can do is plant a seed. We may not see the harvest, but the psalm invites us to trust that our tears and our labour are not wasted: hope can take root even in difficult ground.

Perhaps this helps us understand Paul's words a little better. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances."

Paul is not suggesting that we should be grateful for everything that happens to us. There are things for which gratitude would be entirely inappropriate: cruelty, abuse, oppression and needless suffering. Rather, he invites us to keep finding reasons for gratitude without becoming blind to the things that need to change, to keep praying without giving up, to keep rejoicing without pretending that life is easy.

And then he adds something particularly important: "Test everything; hold fast to what is good."

I love that line because it reminds us that faith does not require us to switch off our minds. We are allowed to ask questions, to examine what we have been taught, to recognise when something is harmful, unjust or simply no longer helpful. Rather, we are called to discern, to test what we hear against the goodness, compassion and justice we see in Jesus. And then, having recognised what is good, to hold on to it.

What does that look like for our church today? How do we hold on to what is good? Surely this is about being a community that keeps kindness alive in an unkind world, keeps generosity alive in a world that tells us to look after ourselves first, keeps working for peace when conflict seems easier, keeps making room for people who have been excluded, and keeps believing that love is worth the effort.

Finally, we meet John the Baptist.

The religious authorities want to know who he is:

- Are you the Messiah?
- Are you Elijah?
- Are you the prophet?

John keeps saying no, he is not the person they are looking for: he is not the light, but is a witness to the light. John knows who he is, but he also knows who he is not. He doesn't need to be the hero of the story, his task is to point towards something greater than himself.

Can we do the same? We are not the light. We are not the source of all hope. We cannot solve every problem, heal every wound or answer every question. We can, however, point towards the light. We can become people through whom others catch a glimpse of God's love.

So here we are, in the third week of Advent. The world is still complicated. There are still tears to be shed. There are still injustices to challenge and broken places to rebuild.

Christmas will not magically make all of that disappear, but Isaiah reminds us that God is at work bringing freedom and restoration. The psalm reminds us that tears and joy can belong to the same story. Paul reminds us to keep praying, keep giving thanks, and keep hold of what is good. And John reminds us that we can all become witnesses to the light.

Perhaps, then, we can rejoice. Not because everything is as it should be, but because we believe that it need not remain as it is, and because the light shines in the darkness, even when the darkness has not yet disappeared.

This Advent, may we be people who sow seeds of hope, who hold fast to what is good, and who help others catch a glimpse of the light. And may our joy be more than a feeling we experience at Christmas, may it become a way of living.

Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

- Paul tells us to rejoice always. What do you think the difference is between genuine Christian joy and simply trying to be cheerful? Can you remember a time when hope and sadness existed together in your life?
- Isaiah speaks of good news for the poor, freedom for the oppressed and comfort for those who mourn. Where might our church be called to turn those promises into practical action?
- John the Baptist understands that he is not the light, but that he can point towards it. How might we, as individuals and as a church, help other people catch a glimpse of hope this Advent?

Amen.[4]

Hymn:
188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains OR
228 STF – Hail to the Lord's anointed

Prayers of intercession
God of justice, in this season of consumption and consumerism, remind us of your desire for justice and peace, not for a few lucky people, but for the whole world.

Creator God, as we anticipate the birth of your Son, we recognise our responsibility to care for the Earth. We pray for the healing of our planet, that we may be good stewards of the environment and protect the precious gift of creation you have entrusted to us.

Lord of Light, as we light the Advent candles, we acknowledge the darkness that can sometimes envelop our world. May the hope and promise of Christ's coming dispel despair and bring new beginnings to those who are struggling.

Prince of peace, in a world of conflict and disagreement, shine the light of your peace and come by your grace.

In a moment of quiet, we bring our own prayers for a just, safe, fair world and for comfort and healing for those known to us.

[Hold a few minutes of silence]

Lord, you know our hearts and you hear our hurts. This Advent season, come amongst us by your Spirit, that those in need might experience the miracle of your coming close, your Christmas story born again in their hearts today.

In Jesus' name we pray
Amen.[5]

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[4] Reflection written by Tim Baker

[5] Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

We will now take up the offering.

Thank you, O God, for all your many gifts to us.
Thank you for the ways in which you have blessed and uplifted us.
Accept these gifts, we pray, and help us to use all that we have to build your kingdom here on earth,
In Jesus' name,
Amen.[6]

Hymn:
330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come! OR
162 STF – The prophets' voice comes down the years

Blessing

The Christ is coming,
The Christ is in our midst,
The love we seek is all around, if only we can see it.
Look up, look out and seek the Kingdom of God, this and every day.

Amen.[7]

[6] Additional prayers by Tim Baker

[7] Additional prayers by Tim Baker