



## ADVENT 3A

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

# Third Sunday in Advent - Year A

14th December 2025



## Order of Service

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**166 STF – ‘Christmas is coming!’ The Church is glad to sing OR**

**174 STF – Light a candle in a darkened place**

Opening Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**264 STF – Make way, make way for Christ the King OR**

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

Readings: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

**Hymn:**

**264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the king in splendour arrives OR**

**335 STF – Rejoice, the Lord is King!**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**693 STF – Beauty for brokenness OR**

**404 STF – God’s spirit is in my heart**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

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

**364 STF – O for a thousand tongues to sing**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

**Many more resources and inspiration for this week’s lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## **Call to worship**

O come, O come Immanuel,  
Come that we might know you close,  
Come that we might encounter you,  
Come that your Spirit might be in the midst of our conversations and our stillness,  
Our singing and dancing,  
Our working and our playing,  
Our striving and our resting.  
Come, O come, we pray

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

166 STF – ‘Christmas is coming!’ The Church is glad to sing OR

174 STF – Light a candle in a darkened place

## **Opening Prayers**

An advent prayer of Joyful Hope.

Let us pray.

Ever faithful and loving God,  
We come before you today on the third Sunday in advent.

As the festive season grows closer we wait in faith like a child on Christmas morning, for the excitement of what is to come.

Hearts full of joy, hope and anticipation of the arrival of Jesus.

Help teach us to be patient and steadfast,  
Waiting in faith alone trusting in your plan and timing.

We see the vision of restoration you had for earth as you chose to send your only son.

To send healing and renewal to revive us.

Thank you for the gift of your Son.

For sending Jesus to walk amongst us, a part of you with us here on earth.  
Protecting the vulnerable, valuing the presence of care, joy and hope in life.  
Lead us to live life in this way, to model the image of your son.

We value life and live in faith following you.

Knowing the blessing bestowed upon us from you  
Our hearts sing in praise.

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

A song of joy because Jesus is coming.  
A song of hope in God's justice and faithfulness  
A song of endurance as we await for that coming to be complete  
A song of assurance that Jesus is the one we have been waiting for.  
We open our lives and hearts to you.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

Have you ever witnessed the impossible happen? Has something you never imagined would come true actually transpired? I wonder how you felt when it did? Were you surprised or shocked? Or maybe flabbergasted? *(You might like to take a few suggestions from the congregation in response to these questions or share some impossible things that could never happen).*

In today's bible passages there is much talk of seemingly impossible things happening...Jesus speaks of the blind being able to see, the deaf hearing, people coming back to life after death. Then Isaiah's prophecy mentions water in the wilderness and streams in the desert. These things sound as though they could never happen in our day to day lives. They're unbelievable.

As we patiently wait for Christmas and the arrival of Jesus, we're reminded that the impossible happens when God is involved! The Messiah – God's son – Saviour of the world, is going to be born.

*(Pictures or objects could be used to illustrate these following points)* Not in a splendid palace but in a simple household, not as a mighty warrior but as a helpless baby. All our ideas of what it means and looks like for God to become human are turned upside down. The impossible made possible!

What is our response to this amazing news? Well, it's a short word: J-O-Y - joy! Joy because we get to see and know God in human form. Jesus, born a baby, growing as a child until he becomes a grown up. Someone just like the people we see around us but with one major difference! Jesus is God's son here on earth.

So in those moments in the coming days of advent when we might be getting impatient and fed up with all the waiting! Let's remind ourselves of this amazing news! That the thing no one ever believed could actually happen is: Jesus is coming! We can rejoice and be glad and praise God. Let's give God the praise now by shaking and waving our hands (Using either one of these BSL translations - <https://christianbsl.com/vocabulary/praise-praising-god>)

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Alice Arbon-Maher

<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

## **Hymn:**

264 STF – Make way, make way for Christ the King OR

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

**Readings:** Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

## **Hymn:**

264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the king in splendour arrives OR

335 STF – Rejoice, the Lord is King!

## **Reflections on the readings**

We've reached the third Sunday of Advent — sometimes called Gaudete Sunday which means rejoice.

In some traditions, the candle on the advent wreath that is lit is pink, a little flash of joy in the middle of Advent's darker, quieter tones. It is, perhaps, the church's way of saying: 'Hold on. The waiting is almost over. Hope is beginning to blossom.'

But if we're honest, that can be a tricky message to hear. Because for many of us, this time of year isn't automatically joyful. The news isn't joyful. The waiting – for justice, for healing, for reconciliation – feels long. And we might look around and think, "Where exactly is the joy supposed to come from?"

Today's scriptures are for *that* feeling.

Isaiah 35 opens with this wild image:

'The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom.'

The prophet is speaking to a people who've been through exile: disoriented, displaced, exhausted. And yet he dares to imagine a world turned upside down by God's renewal.

The dry places start to bloom.

The fearful find courage.

The weak are strengthened.

Even the path home, 'a highway in the desert,' becomes safe and joyful for all.

This is poetry, yes, but it's also protest. Isaiah looks at the devastation around him and insists: This is not the end of the story.

The desert will not stay barren.

The people will not stay lost.

And God's love will make a way, even here.

I wonder if we can hear that same promise today, not as fantasy or denial, but as resistance. A refusal to give up on life blossoming in dry places.

Then we turn to the New Testament and hear James urging the early church:

'Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.'

It's not a passive kind of patience. Not 'sit back and do nothing.'

James uses the image of a farmer: someone who waits with expectation, but also with care. They tend the soil, even when it looks barren, trusting that rain will come.

This kind of patience is active, hopeful, stubborn. It's a faith that says, 'Even if I don't see the harvest yet, I'll keep nurturing what I believe in.'

In Advent, that's what we do: we tend to hope, even in small ways: lighting a candle, showing up for someone, choosing kindness over cynicism.

These small acts are like watering dry soil. They're our way of saying, 'We still believe love will break through.'

And finally we turn to the gospel reading and we meet John the Baptist, now in prison.

This fiery prophet who once shouted, 'Prepare the way of the Lord!' is now confined, isolated, maybe wondering if he got it wrong.

He sends word to Jesus:

'Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?'

That question feels deeply human.

John is saying, 'I thought I knew what salvation looked like. But now, from where I sit, it doesn't look like what I expected.'

Can you relate? Sometimes the hope we were promised doesn't come in the way we imagined. Healing takes longer. Justice feels delayed. God seems quiet.

And Jesus doesn't scold John for asking. He simply says: 'Go and tell John what you hear and see.'

'The blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.'

In other words: look for signs of life where you are. Look for love at work in small, unexpected ways. The kingdom is already sprouting, even if it doesn't look like what we pictured.

Isaiah dreamed of flowers in the desert. James called for steady, patient faith. Jesus pointed to quiet miracles already unfolding. All three are inviting us into the same truth:

Advent hope is not naïve optimism. It's choosing to trust that God's love is already germinating beneath the surface, even when we can't yet see the bloom.

And maybe that's what joy looks like this Sunday, not cheerfulness we have to fake, but the deep gladness that comes from noticing God's work in the ordinary, the overlooked, the half-finished.

So today, as we light that pink candle of joy, maybe we can think of it as a desert flower, fragile but fierce.

A reminder that joy doesn't mean everything's easy; it means that love is alive, even here.

So keep tending your patch of hope.

Keep watering the dry soil.

Keep looking for blossoms: in your heart, in your neighbour, in this hurting world.

Because the promise still stands:

'The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom.'

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Tim Baker

**Hymn:**

693 STF – Beauty for brokenness OR

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart

**Prayers of intercession**

God of life,  
we pray for your creation  
for the wild places, the oceans and rivers,  
the forests and fields that long to rejoice and blossom.

Where the earth is weary and wounded,  
teach us to live gently,  
to repair what we have broken,  
and to nurture what you have made.

We pray for all nations facing conflict, hunger, and climate crisis —  
for peace in Israel and Palestine, in Ukraine, and in every place of violence;  
for leaders who will choose compassion over power,  
and for communities working quietly for reconciliation.

God of hope,  
let the desert rejoice and blossom.

God of justice and mercy,  
we pray for our country in a time of tension and change.

We hold before you those who struggle to afford warmth and food,  
those waiting too long for medical care,  
and those who feel unseen or unheard.

We give thanks for all who serve their neighbours:  
for food banks, charities, schools, GP surgeries, and local councils,  
and for every volunteer who keeps community alive.

Bless this town and those who call it home –  
our shops and schools, our streets and parks.

Help us to notice where your love is already at work among us.

God of hope,  
let the desert rejoice and blossom.

God of promise,  
we pray for your Church — here and around the world.  
Keep us patient in waiting and bold in love.

Where the Church has grown tired or fearful,  
breathe new life.

Where we are tempted to look for you only in grand places,  
open our eyes to see you in the small and surprising ones,  
in acts of kindness, in songs of protest, in quiet prayer.

God of hope,  
let the desert rejoice and blossom.

God of comfort,  
we pray for all who walk through hard or lonely deserts today.

For those who are ill or in pain;  
for those who grieve;  
for those who feel forgotten or afraid.

May your healing Spirit be near them,  
and may we be your hands and heart in their lives.

God of hope,  
let the desert rejoice and blossom.

God of joy,  
as we journey through Advent,  
keep us awake to your presence.

Give us courage to act justly,  
patience to wait with faith,  
and joy that is deeper than circumstance.

Make us a people of blossoming hope,  
trusting that even in barren places,  
your love is already growing.

God of hope,  
let the desert rejoice and blossom.

Gather these and all our prayers,  
spoken and unspoken,  
in the words Jesus taught us:

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 trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

**We will now take up the offering.**

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker



Thank you, Advent God,  
For the gifts we have received,  
The gifts that far outweigh the present-giving of the Christmas season,  
Gifts that we echo with our small tokens of giving today.  
Use these gifts, and our hearts, Lord, for your will to be done, here on earth as it is in heaven,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

**Hymn:**

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

364 STF – O for a thousand tongues to sing

**Blessing**

May you go out into a world in need, people of the light,  
And may you go out to discover that the Spirit of God is already there, ahead of you, guiding the way.

May you act with grace, with love, and seek peace in your own hearts and the hearts of all you meet,

By the power of the Prince of Peace himself, Jesus Christ,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker