

**13<sup>th</sup> December Advent 3 JOY**

**Call to worship**

Advent God, come amongst us.  
God of joy, put your smile on our faces,  
Advent God, put your joy in our hearts and lives  
May it shine out like the candle flames flickering in the darkness.  
Amen.

**Lighting our Advent Candles**

Uncontainable, irrepressible, bubbling up in an explosion of energy. What the weary long for, what our children often embody, what makes the Divine smile – joy. It cannot be paid for, but is a priceless treasure. As we hope for your arrival, as we pray for peace, as we wait and watch how you might reveal yourself to us, God give us joy in your Advent

Light Candles 1, 2 & 3

**We light a candle for joy. May it light the way.**

Joy is not a commodity that can be bought or sold, but lives deep in the human spirit. Help us to hear that truth and believe it. Let go of what our consumer culture says will bring us happiness – money, success. If we have robbed others of what they need in our clamour and quest for more than our fair share, forgive us. Help us hear the call of John the Baptist to turn around and begin again. God of love, we were made in joy. May we live that way.  
Amen.

**HYMN Dear Lord and Father of mankind**

1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
forgive our foolish ways;  
re clothe us in our rightful mind,  
in purer lives thy service find,  
in deeper reverence, praise.

3 Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease;  
take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of thy peace.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard  
beside the Syrian sea  
the gracious calling of the Lord,  
let us, like them, without a word  
rise up and follow thee.

4 Breathe through the heats of our desire  
thy coolness and thy balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier  
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**Prayers**

Gracious God, "Drop Thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease..."  
"Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace."

*[Pause]*

Take our busyness  
Take our excitement  
Take our impatience  
Take our fears  
Take our uncertainties  
Take our confessions  
and lead us to bring good news to the oppressed;  
lead us to where broken hearts need binding;  
lead us to where captives can be liberated;

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lead us to where mourners yearn to be comforted;  
lead us to proclaim the year of your favour. Amen.

**Let us now say the Lord's Prayer**

**Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 The Good News of Deliverance**

**61** The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; <sup>3</sup> to provide for those who mourn in Zion to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

<sup>4</sup> They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. <sup>9</sup> Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.

<sup>10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations

**Hebrews 4 : 14 and Hebrews 7 : 23 - 24**

Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

<sup>23</sup> Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; <sup>24</sup> but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

**Reflection**

Today I have chosen perhaps not one of the most familiar names associated with Jesus but one none the less worth spending a few minutes thinking about. It's the name referred to in the verse from Hebrews chapter 4, 'Great High priest'.

The most prestigious spiritual leader in Israel was the high priest. Of all the priests, he was the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people.

After ceremonial cleansing for his own sins, he would go behind the thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. There he would offer the blood of a goat on the golden mercy seat that sat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, so that the sins of Israel would be covered for another year.

The old priesthood and system of sacrifices was not meant to last forever. God gave them to Moses and the Israelites to foreshadow their fulfilment in Jesus. They had to repeat sacrifices every year, but Jesus' death on the cross made the final atonement for our sins and abolished the system once and for all.

Just as the Aaronic high priests would disappear from the people's view when they entered the Holy of Holies, so Jesus passed through the heavens into the sanctuary of God. He is the One to hear our prayers because He has entered the Holy of Holies in heaven.

As the writer of Hebrews explains, there were many high priests throughout history " since death prevented them continuing in office; but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. He remains to this day the enduring High Priest who is alive and able to fulfil that role.

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In heaven, Jesus sits on the great throne of grace, ready to hear our prayers and assist us in our time of need; He sympathises with our weaknesses because He Himself was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4: 15-16) Jesus is not aloof and prideful but rather concerned and available, This comforting truth invites us to approach the throne of grace with confidence.

Because Jesus is our High Priest, we no longer need anyone else to intercede between us and God. We have direct access to the Father through Jesus and He stands ready and willing to help us in our time of need.

What a privilege to have direct access to God. It might seem strange to picture the Old Testament sacrifices, especially since many of us recoil from the sight of blood. But understanding the priests' role in offering sacrifices helps us rejoice in the finished work of Jesus. So approach the throne of grace confidently today and pour out your heart to God. You will not be turned away.

**Prayer**

Lord, Jesus, it is hard to grasp exactly what you have done for us. You've freed us from all the requirements of purification, rituals, sacrifices and law. Through your death on the cross, you tore the curtain that separated us from the presence of God, and now we can come directly to you without any other mediator. Forgive us for neglecting this privilege so often. Rekindle in us a desire to spend time in your presence and to live our lives in the daily realities of your throne room. AMEN

**Prayers of intercession**

Let us pray now to our loving God who always keeps His promises, who knows and loves us and who values us all so very much.

Loving Father, keep your Church faithful in telling the good news of Jesus Christ especially in a world where so many have little or no knowledge of your saving grace. We pray, Lord for our work and witness in the communities in which we live. May we live our lives in such a way that those we meet may see something of your Son in us. We are called to be your eyes, your ears and your words to our world today. Help us to see as you would see, listen as you would listen and may we speak your words of truth and love.

Lord in your love  
Hear our prayer

We pray particularly for the elderly this Christmas time- especially those in our Care Homes who have been unable to share times with their families and loved ones throughout this difficult year. Come close to them, especially at this time and we pray that in some small way they may experience the joy of this season.

Lord in your love  
Hear our prayer

We pray for our world, that there may be integrity in leadership, mercy and justice for rich and poor, strong and weak; that there may be peace among nations and respect for all. We ask your wisdom for those battling to solve the issues associated with Brexit. We pray for a solution that will allow all countries to come together without disruption or dispute. We pray for our broken, fragile world that you love and seek to redeem. Help us all to find ways to make our world a better place for everyone to live in. Help us to change the way we live our lives so that we reduce the negative impacts on our climate.

Lord in your love  
Hear our prayer

We pray, Lord, for our community, our families and friends – for their hopes and fears. May the love of Christ be shown in what we do and how we speak. We remember now all those we know in special need – locked in physical and emotional pain; weighed down

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with worry or despair. God of Advent hope, will you restore and replenish them, comfort and free them.

Lord in your love  
Hear our prayer

Finally, loving Father, we commend to your love those who have died, loved ones we especially miss at this time – whose memory we treasure. May they, and we in our turn, experience for ever the joy of your eternity.  
We bring these prayers to you in Jesus name. AMEN

**Hymn: Joy to the World**

Joy to the world, the Lord is come  
Let earth receive her King  
Let every heart prepare him room  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and heaven and nature sing.

No more let sins and sorrows grow  
Nor thorns infest the ground.  
He comes to make his blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found  
Far as the curse is found  
Far as, far as the curse is found

Joy to the earth, the Saviour reigns  
Let men their songs employ  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and  
plains  
Repeat the sounding joy  
Repeat the sounding joy  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

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.

Isaac Watts  
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**Blessing**

May the promise and the hope of the Advent season fill our hearts and minds with the true spirit of giving and send us out to live and work for the good of all people.  
Amen