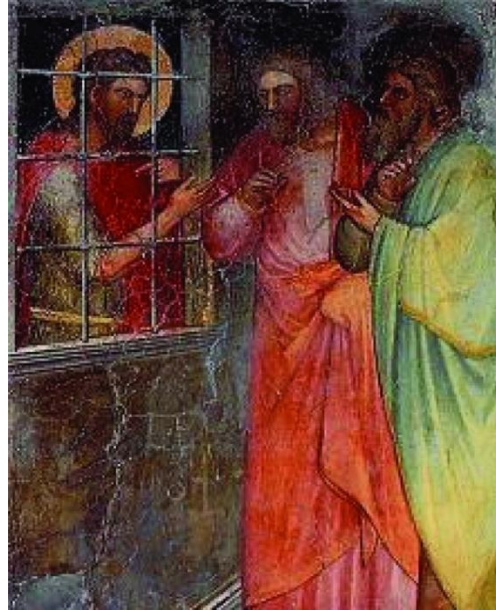


Third Sunday in Advent

December 14, 2025



John the Baptist in Prison
by Giusto de' Menabuoi, 1376

We Gather in Response to God's Invitation

THE GIFT OF MUSIC TO GATHER US

GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

One: In Advent, we anticipate God coming in Christ to make it clear that God's love is for all persons: persons of every race, culture, or color; persons of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and identities; persons of all ages and abilities; persons of every legal, economic, and marital status. All persons whom the world would say there is "no room at the inn." God has come into the world as Jesus, is present as the Spirit of Christ, and is coming again as the risen Christ, because God delights in each and every one of you.

All: **Thanks be to God!**

So we as a community that seeks to worship, sing, pray, fellowship, serve, give, grow and live in faith, invite each of you to fully participate, share, and lead.

LIGHTING THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE: SEEKING (*MATTHEW 11:2-11*)

This is the season of seeking. This is the day for telling and sharing.

We find ourselves reluctant to go out and tell, O God. We are seekers ourselves—we are inadequate vessels of your good news.

Keep your candles lit. Loosen your tongue with purpose.

Too long, O God, we have focused our voices on out-shouting evil, and neglected to sing of your goodness. Too long, we have hidden our light as your witnesses. Still you call us to go.

By the light of Advent, we carry Emmanuel's good news into the world.

(The third Advent candle is lit.)

Because of who YOU are and where YOU are on life's journey, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!

***CALL TO WORSHIP (RESPONSIVE)**

**An asterisk indicates when the people stand in body or spirit.*

One: The joy of the season is upon us. The time is almost here.

All: **We have come to praise the Lord!**

We are here to sing praises to God, the Holy One in whom we place our trust.

God opens our eyes and lifts us up.

Let us praise God

who reigns forever.

***OPENING PRAYER (TOGETHER)**

God of all generations, we are impatient for your coming to save our generation. We are ready for a word of hope in the wilderness where we live. We want to see as we have not seen before. We long to hear the message we have previously ignored. We are eager to join in the singing that announces good news to the world. Amen.

***SINGING TOGETHER**

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

Brown #168

**Come, Thou long expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.**

**Born Thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, Now Thy gracious Kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit Raise us to Thy glorious throne.**

We Pray for Transformation and New Life

INTRODUCTION

We gather in this season of Advent anticipating hope, praying for peace, attempting to cultivate joy and share love amidst commotion, grief, despair and uncertainty.

Moment of silence.

PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE (TOGETHER)

God, we confess that we have often placed our hope in people and things that can't fulfill our every need. We have searched for peace in shallow places. We have mistaken joy for temporal pleasure and artificial exhilaration. We have put limits on the ways we love, excluding those who need our loving kindness the most. God, when we have lost our way, show us yours. Guide us to the hope in you that will renew our strength. Lead us to your peace that transcends all understanding. Fill us with a joy we can only experience in your presence.

Because of who YOU are and where YOU are on life's journey, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!

Remind us that you have always loved us with an everlasting love, so that we may share that love with others. Amen.

Time for silent reflection.

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S GRACE

In this season of desolation and uncertainty, it is good to know that God's love for us is sure—that God's commitment to us is definite—that God is walking with us, guiding us, as the compassionate companion that we are called to be for each other.

Let us live into this gift. Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

(As a sign of our deep fellowship and communion with God and with one another, let us personally greet one another with a handshake or peace sign and bless one another with the peace that comes from being in Christ.)

God will speak peace to God's people, to those who turn to God in their hearts, and with their feet and hands.

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Let us share the peace of Christ with one another.

*SINGING TOGETHER

"Breath of Heaven" chorus

**Breath of Heaven, hold us together,
Be forever near us, Breath of Heaven.
Breath of Heaven, lighten our darkness,
Pour over us Your holiness,
For You are holy, Breath of Heaven.**

CCLI Song # 1128784; Amy Grant and Chris Eaton; © 1992 Clouseau Music Ltd; Age To Age Music, Inc.; Riverstone Music, Inc.

We Hear God's Word

MINISTRY THROUGH MUSIC

"Prepare Ye!"

J.A. Shafferman, A.L. Page

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Speak to us, God. Speak to us in the waiting, the watching, the hoping, the longing, the sorrow, the sighing, the rejoicing. Speak to us by your Word in these Advent days, and walk with us until the day of your coming. Amen.

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING

ISAIAH 35:1-10

The redeemed return to Zion with joy. Our reading from Isaiah begins.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and shouting.

Because of who YOU are and where YOU are on life's journey, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;

⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp;
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God’s people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the Lord shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God endures forever.

Amen!

Because of who YOU are and where YOU are on life’s journey, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!

RESPONSIVE PSALTER READING:

PSALM 146

The psalmist offers joyful praise for God's help. Our responsive psalter reading begins.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth;

on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed;

who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord!

GOSPEL READING:

MATTHEW 11:2-11

John sends messengers to Jesus asking if he is the one who is to come, and then Jesus praises John. Hear this Good News.

² When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ⁴ Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹ What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

¹¹ "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The Gospel of Christ.

Praise to you, O Christ!

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MEDITATION:

“Questioning John”

Pastor Dave

SINGING TOGETHER:

“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”

Brown #239, vs 1,3,4

Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates: Behold, the King of glory waits!

The King of kings is drawing near, The Savior of the world is here.

Fling wide the portals of your heart: Make it a temple, set apart

From earthly use for heaven’s employ, Adorned with prayer and love and joy.

Redeemer, come! I open wide My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!

Let me Thy inner presence feel: Thy grace and love in me reveal.

We Respond to God’s Word

A TIME FOR COMMUNAL PRAYER

SHARING OF JOYS AND CONCERNS

You are invited to share joys and concerns we can pray for together. Let our sharing itself be an act of prayer.

ENTERING INTO PRAYER: “Jesus, Name Above All Names”

Jesus, Name above all names, Beautiful Savior, Glorious Lord,

Emmanuel, God is with us, Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.

PRAYERS ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE

THE PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR

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 sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: “Jesus, Name Above All Names”

Jesus, Loving Shepherd, Vine of the Branches, Son of God,

Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Lord of the Universe, Light of the World.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO SHARING OUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS

You are invited to place your gifts in the offering basket as you arrive or depart from our worship together.

The day of rejoicing is coming, the prophet Isaiah says, and we await it together; our gifts today in this season of waiting and hope help us to strengthen one another and to offer hope to the world as we look forward to that great day of everlasting joy.

*DEDICATING OUR OFFERINGS (TOGETHER)

With these gifts, dear God, accept the praise and thanksgiving of our hearts, which rejoice in your goodness and love. Let our gifts point to your presence in

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the world, and further your dream for the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Amen.

We Go Out to Serve

***SINGING TOGETHER**

“How Great Our Joy!”

Brown #182

**While by the sheep we watched at night,
Glad tidings brought an angel bright.**

Refrain: **How great our joy! Great our joy!**

Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!

Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!

Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!

**There shall be born, so he did say,
In Bethlehem a Child today. [Refrain]**

**There shall the Child lie in a stall,
This child who shall redeem us all. [Refrain]**

**This gift of God we'll cherish well,
That ever joy our hearts shall fill. [Refrain]**

***GOOD WORDS FOR GOING FORTH**

Go forth with great expectation, waiting for God's mercy to fill us, waiting for God's grace to surround us, waiting for God's child to lead us to the cross and beyond. And in that waiting, may God bless and keep you, may God's face shine upon you, may God be gracious to you and give you peace. Amen.

***SUNG RESPONSE**

“Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn”

Black #107, verse 4

**Rejoice, rejoice, take heart in the night, though cold the winter and cheerless,
the rising sun shall crown you with light, be strong and loving and fearless;
Love be our song and love our prayer, and love, our endless story,
may God fill every day we share, and bring us at last into glory.**

DISMISSAL

Go and tell the good news of healing, compassion and courage on behalf of those in need.

Thanks be to God that God has begun to reign.

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