

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you ... **and also with you.** Welcome to worship at Knox Presbyterian Bayfield on this third Sunday of Advent

Announcements

HYMN Praise God #306

CALL TO WORSHIP [responsive] Insert

Prayer of Adoration and Confession [**Responsive**]

God of Light and Love, We rejoice in your presence this day. You look kindly on us, no matter how we came to be here. You bring order from chaos. You call to your people to seek justice for the vulnerable. You turn weeping into laughter, promising life made new. You redeem all who are lost, providing each with a path and purpose. And so we come to you in joy, trusting you to bring peace and hope into these uncertain times. Receive our worship through Christ, your Son and our Saviour. Amen.

Generous God, we confess that our concerns are narrow as we tend to focus on our own lives. Too often the opportunities to say thanks or to offer encouragement slip by. Anxiety turns us inward and anger can make us lash out. Forgive us when we neglect the joy you provide. Turn our hearts back to you and inspire us with your love made visible in Jesus Christ. Amen

Assurance of Pardon May the peace of Jesus the Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn Hope is a star [v 1-3] #119

To Hear The Word Of God

Prayer For Illumination and Scripture¹

Your Word, O God, comes to us in the translation of ancient scripture. Send your Holy Spirit to open our minds with understanding and our hearts with wisdom in the name of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

Scripture

Tanakh*	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11	[B#691/W#767]
Psalms	Psalms 126	[B#572/W#126]
Epistle	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	[B#205/W#219]

¹ Page #'s for pew bibles with Blue or White edged pages

Gospel

John 1:6–8, 19–28

[B#91 /W#94]

May God bless our understanding of this, God's holy word. **The word of the Lord.**

Message

O holy One, by the power of your Holy Spirit at work in the word read and proclaimed, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

We listen to the words of Isaiah, John, and Paul to discover more about the ways in which we might live into the light of Christ and proclaim our faith in the wilderness of the 21st century.

Paul's letter affirms his deep, joy-filled connection with the congregation in Thessalonica. He urged them to rejoice, pray, and give thanks unreservedly and absolutely. On this third Sunday of Advent we connect his letter to messages from Isaiah and John.

Epistle 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 [B#205/W#219]

In one of his earliest letters, Paul gives thanks that the church has remained faithful despite great adversity and many distractions. Although it was dangerous, Paul urged them to remain faithful to the one true God and encouraged them to practice agape, a form of love. There are many forms of love that differ in nuanced ways. The love of God, love of parents, siblings, children, church, self, and pets. For some, the love of money and material possessions. In part, Paul's vision of agape ... love, recognizes that people are to value themselves and one another. In other writings, he describes the fruit of the Spirit that allows us to freely love. The Spirit shapes us through these fruits. It is not that we discern what God has done on our behalf and then love our neighbors in response. Rather, discerning what God has done in Christ and what Christ has done ... shapes the way we love our neighbors, the way we love God and God's creation. It is with love that we are able to see and appreciate all that God has done.

It can be difficult to see the love of God when our vision is clouded by cultural forces or misinformation. In a sense, blinders block us from seeing what we need to see ... like that blind spot in our vision when we drive. You may be familiar with the blinders that horses wear, particularly when they are on roads with vehicles. In many rural communities, such as Elmira and Conestogo, the traditional Mennonites use horse and buggy to travel. The horses often have blinders on to restrict their vision. This increases their reliance on the

person holding the reins. When the horse trusts the driver it can be assured that it is in good hands, even in the midst of danger. Consider who holds the reins on your life. We can choose to follow the cultural norms, which often center on individualism, consumerism, and capitalism. We can choose to follow Christ which provides us with the freedom to see the world through a perspective of love and grace within community. The Spirit moves us to take action in the world, to embody the ways of the living Christ. The Spirit moved John, the son of Zechariah. He definitely put blinders on to follow God's lead. In the gospel reading we hear an account from the disciple John writing about this other John. In last week's reading, in Mark's gospel, we encountered the camel hair wearing, locust and honey eating John the baptizer in Mark's gospel. This same John is identified as John the son of Zechariah in Luke's gospel, and in Matthew's gospel he is John the Baptist. Today, in John's gospel, he is simply John. This loud fellow who told everyone who will listen about the light he saw fall to earth. John helped people to see the same light. And, the authorities pressed him to identify himself.

Gospel John 1:6-8, 19-28 [B#91 /W#94]

In her commentary, Karoline Lewis wrote, "The John of John's Gospel is never called the Baptist. Rather, this is John the Witness. While he is described as doing some general baptizing here and there, a careful read of John's story of Jesus' baptism reveals that John does not baptize Jesus. His primary role is not as one who baptizes but one who testifies to the light coming into the world, a very human witness to a cosmic event. God is about ordering a new creation, a new presence of light in the world but it necessitates a fellow human to point to its presence, otherwise, human as we are, we might not see it. That human is John."

The different aspects of John may help us to recognize the many ways that we are experienced. Consider the ways in which others experience you as friend, daughter/son, sibling, cousin, aunt/uncle, parent, grandparent, and in the roles you have in your working life. Each of you have wonderfully complex. The gospels encourage us to embrace the ways in which God has created us to live within his creation.

This leadership within this congregation have focused on enriching the music shared in this sanctuary with the community. The increased amount of special music has drawn people into this worship space. Although it may seem strange to many of you, there are

generations of people in this country who have never stepped inside a church. It was remarkable to have about 105 people here, in this sanctuary, yesterday. We were bursting at the seams. During the Christmas concert, two remarkably talented young harpists played solos. The first, a 4 year old girl, received a standing ovation. The second, I think she was in her late teens, played with emotion that seemed beyond her years. Watching and listening to her play might lead to the conclusion that she practices endlessly to hone her gift. After she played, Martha shared that the talented and graceful harpist was also the premier pitcher in the baseball league. Many talented musicians gathered together to share their gifts with us yesterday.

We are called to embrace our gifts and to develop our skills as we walk in the ways of Christ. Many lives are enriched when people embrace their gifts and share them in community. In John's gospel, we find that "Sin is unbelief which has as its tragic consequence separation from God. It seems that the last thing that separated God from God's creation was to know what it means to be us."² Sin is the turning away from God, refusing to see and hear God's call on our lives. John the Witness was attentive to his call as he called out to others with the message, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it." The book of Genesis begins with God's first command, "Let there be light". God became human, became the living light, the living Word, within the darkness. Light came into the world and changed everything. Light allowed for life, growth, change, and necessary adjustments. Light stimulates photosynthesis, circadian rhythms, vision, and the brain's concept of time. Light is the power source of life. In the winter, in the midst of darkest and the shortest days of the year, the light of Christ offers hope, peace, joy, and love. John's declaration that the light of the world is continually shining when darkness should prevail, speaks to our need for light.

In this passage, John declared who he is not... "I am not the Messiah, I am not Elijah." he is not the light that shines into the darkness ... he was called to be a witness to testify to the light. John defines himself through his relationship with Jesus. In her commentary "Identity Crisis", Lewis asked, "Can we make similar claims about our purpose? Can we respond to "who are you?" with the same indivisibility with God and all that God wants us to be? Can we locate our identity as intimately with Jesus?"

2

We must pay attention to what John is saying, to be sure that we hear the 'not'. There are ten "not's," "neithers," and "no's." He rejects the typical ways of describing what is ... by refusing to use the common descriptions. John disrupts their way of thinking and being. Barbara Brown Taylor describes it in this way, "It is as if the author has asked his readers to watch while John performs the old trick of yanking the tablecloth off the table that has been set for the Messiah. Everything is in place—the best china, the six-piece silverware settings, the Waterford wine glasses. The whole point of the trick is to yank the cloth so quickly that all these treasures are left trembling where they stand, but that is not how it happens this time. When John yanks the tablecloth, he takes everything with it: not, not, no, neither, not. The expected crash never comes. All the tableware simply vanishes as if it never was there. In that moment, John testifies to the light and to the light alone." In this time of advent, consider how your love of Christ reflects the light of God's presence into the world. Be attentive to the many ways in which you touch the lives of others. Following in the ways of Christ brings the good news to the oppressed, helps to heal the broken hearted, and, proclaims freedom to the imprisoned. Praise be to God for visions and the movement of the Spirit among us.

Hymn **'Twas in the moon of wintertime** **#144**

THE OFFERING OF OUR LIFE AND LABOUR TO THE LORD

Quote Waiting is a period of learning. The longer we wait, the more we hear about him for whom we are waiting. Henri Nouwen

This Sunday, the Advent theme is Joy. Scripture and song remind us to rejoice in Lord. Think of your offering as an opportunity to spread joy in God's world, even when the world seems uncertain. Rejoice in the Lord and give thankfully for Christ's sake.

Doxology We give Thee but Thine own, What e'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee.

Blessing of Gifts

God of justice and joy, we bring our gifts to you in gratitude for your unfailing goodness to us. Bless our offerings that they may be used to create justice and bring joy into the world in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayers of the People

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD

2023 12 17

Come, Christ Jesus, and enter our lives today with your blessing. We yearn for the peace you bring. Draw near to us in faithfulness. God, as this season holds celebration in the face of uncertainty, may we know your presence.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guide, as you show us the way to wisdom and gratitude. We are thankful for the kindness we know in friends and good neighbours, in warm houses and warm smiles. Encourage us to reach out to those who need your embrace and ours. Come, Christ Jesus, be our hope and touch us with your healing and grace. We remember before you all those we know and those known to you alone. We lift up those who are living with loss or illness this season, those who face depression or discouragement, and all who are unable to joy this year. May they experience your comfort in their lives. God of hope, we ask you to linger with all who are dealing with challenges: Jim T; Judith & Gerry; Rob, Valerie, Jim & Jane; Carl; Betty Lou; Ruth; Audrey & Grace; Lori and family; and, Don, Phyllis, and Shawn. We lift up all who are on our hearts as they face immense challenges.

Come, Christ Jesus, claim your rightful place in our hearts. Our world is struggling to find the justice and mercy you call for. Draw near to all who are working for peace and justice, and those striving to mediate or contain conflicts. Encourage honourable action and co-operation on all sides. Give hope to people under oppression and to those living with fear or hunger day by day. Hasten the day when the world's peoples will live as neighbours reconciled in your truth and freedom.

Give us the courage we need to face our future, assured of your presence and power to sustain us. We offer all that we are and all that we hope for through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together as his people: Our Father who art in heaven, hallow'ed 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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn

People in darkness

#124

To Go Forth In God's Name

Commissioning and Benediction

And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepared for Knox Presbyterian Church, Box 565, Bayfield, ON N0M 1G0

6

Minister: Rev. Lisa Dolson 519-955-2158 revlisa dot knoxbayfield@icloud dot com

Resources include: PCC Worship Planner, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/> Feasting on the Word, NRSV Bible, sermons.com

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD

2023 12 17

Postlude

Amen