# Order of Worship Advent 3C

# Making Space for the Grace of Joy

Written by Rev. Dr. Kathleen James-Cavan

## God Gathers Us

### Welcome to Worship

One: (once, facing congregation): Holy Spirit, we welcome you here.

**All:** signing or speaking and physically turning bodies or heads: once to the left, once to the front, once to the right): **Welcome, Holy Spirit! (x3)** [Alternate: **Welcome, Joy-Giver! (x3)**]

ASL **“**[Welcome](https://www.handspeak.com/word/2380/)”

ASL “[Holy Spirit](https://www.signingsavvy.com/sign/holy%2Bspirit/7468/1)”

Land Acknowledgement

Life and Work of the Church

Candle-lighting as Call to Worship

A: As we light the candle of joy today

B: We make space for the grace of joy.

A: Resisting shame and stigma,

B: We rejoice in *all* God’s Creation.

All: Let us share the good news with everyone.

Hymn: “As We Light This Candle” © Lisa Waites, 2024[[1]](#footnote-1)

This Sunday, the first verse, chorus, second verse, chorus, and third verse are sung; to reinforce the music, you could invite your accompanist to play this hymn at the end of the musical prelude, before the service begins. Alternatively, you could have the worship leader and/or the choir sing the first verse and chorus, and then have the congregation join in singing the second verse, chorus, and the third verse. The hymn is designed to add one theme verse each week throughout the Advent season (hope, peace, joy, love), culminating with the fifth verse (Christ) on Christmas Eve.

### Passing the Peace

The Peace of Christ be with you all!

**And also with you.**

Please rise in body or spirit; you are invited to share the peace of Christ with those nearest to you, using a word, sign, or gesture of peace as we prepare to sing our opening hymn together.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Verbal:** “Peace be with you” or “Peace!” ([ASL sign for peace](http://www.handspeak.com/word/1609)). If your congregation is new to signing, try showing this video or have the worship leader model it before inviting the congregation to follow along. Repeating the ASL symbol for “peace” during the Passing of the Peace is a simple, accessible way to add a non-verbal means of participation. Children or adults who find the ASL sign too complex could pass the peace by making the universal “peace” sign. These options help avoid physical contact and honour and include worshippers who are immunocompromised, deaf/hearing impaired, neurodivergent, introverted, or non-verbal.

### Opening Hymn

VU 249 “Rejoice in the Lord Always”

### Prayer of Approach

(A body prayer. Worshipers remain seated but keep their eyes open so they can repeat the actions, if they choose, which move from activity to stillness. The worship leader may offer a description of the movements to assist blind members of the community.)

Leader: Creating God, you know how busy we are with shopping, baking, and cleaning as we prepare for your coming (mime these actions: e.g., handing out cash or rolling the cart for “shopping”, knead for “baking”, vacuum or wash a surface for “cleaning”; you may also want to substitute other actions relevant to the congregation’s context such as “skating,” “singing,” “shovelling snow,” “building,” “writing exams,” “protesting,” etc.).

Today we come here to pause and renew our spirits making space for grace in hope, peace, and joy. (put praying hands together)

Help us to open our hearts (move hands from praying position to outstretched in front, as if receiving something)

and our minds (touch head with both hands)

to your loving presence, (cross hands in front of chest)

Amen.

### Musical Call to Confession

VU34 “Come Now, O God of Peace”[[3]](#footnote-3)

### Prayer of Confession/Reconciliation

Leader: Creating God, through your grace you forgive us, but sometimes we need your help to remind us we are created in your image. We acknowledge the sin of human judgement that raises up some bodies as normal and dismisses others as less-than-normal. Instead, help us to experience you in the joy of all human diversity, including the bodies that make us uncomfortable or the depression that threatens to take away joy. Guide us to be patient with one another, to live better in your crip time,[[4]](#footnote-4) to slow our listening and speaking, and widen our expectations. Help us find the grace of joy in all your creatures, your whole Creation. We ask this prayer in the name of the Christ through whose wounds we find both grace and joy, Amen.

### Words of Assurance

Through Christ and in Christ we are a forgiven people. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

### Children’s Story

*Great Joy* by [Kate DiCamillo](https://www.amazon.com/Kate-DiCamillo/e/B001H6MDMY/ref%3Ddp_byline_cont_book_1) (Candlewick Press, 2007 and 2010). Set in the 1940s, the story features the compassion of a young girl while preparing for her Christmas pageant.

*The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski (Candlewick Press, 2015). A widow and her young son commission a woodworker to carve figures for a nativity scene.

### Children’s Hymn

VU 95 “Joy to the World”

Children of all ages are welcome to remain in the sanctuary for the service, or to participate in our preschool or Sunday School programs. If your child would benefit from an older child or an adult helper to participate more fully in these programs, please talk to your teacher.

## God Speaks Through the Word

### Musical Invitation to the Word

MV97 “Listen, God is Calling”

### Scripture

Zephaniah 3:14–20

Sing, daughter of Zion; God comes to bring you home.

Address conventional association of disability with stigma (save “the lame,” “gather the outcast,” and “change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth”) by adding context with the beginning of the book, which states that people will “walk like the blind” because of their sins; the “lame” and “outcast” represent the whole population.

Isaiah 12:2–6 (VU p. 880)

Proclaim God’s deeds to the nations.

Philippians 4:4–7

Rejoice in God always! Again, I say, rejoice!

Luke 3:7–18

John addresses the crowds, “You brood of vipers!”

### Sermon Seeds

“Surprised by Defiant Joy”

Philippians 4:4–7 and Luke 3:7–18: Examine these passages to distinguish temporary happiness from the experience of joy grounded in the knowledge of God’s love. This week’s extract from Paul’s letter to the Philippians exhorts the recipients to “Rejoice in the Lord always!” even while its author suffers imprisonment. Although Paul’s personal situation brings him pain, his joy in Christ is unalloyed. Such a “both-and” position counters the ableism that pities disabled people or, by extension, regards disabled people living ordinary lives as “inspiring”. Similarly, if read as an accusation, John the Baptist’s address to his followers elicits pain. In what way might those who have come for baptism be considered a “brood of vipers”? Consider that for Luke’s Greek audience, the snake represented new beginnings. Might his discourse identify his audience as changemakers whose repentance or “turn-around” could radically upset social norms? The prophet offers some examples of anti-social behaviour, such as sharing clothing and food. How might the pain of repentance, then, also express joy?

## We Respond to God

### Responsive Hymn

VU 23 “Joy Shall Come” (3x)

### Invitation to Offering

With joy and thanksgiving, let us offer a portion of our blessings of time, talent, or treasure for the work of community in the world.

### Offertory Prayer

Grateful for our blessings, we offer these gifts, O God, that they may help to alleviate pain and spread joy in the world. Amen.

### Offertory Response

VU 55 “In the Bleak Midwinter” (vs 4 only)

### Prayers of the People

(Responsive)

(Words based on Zephaniah 3: 14–20 and singing verse at beginning and end, and chorus within from L. Waites, “Sing, Children of Zion”)

Creator God, in your embrace we know strength and wisdom, grace and acceptance. Thank you that you hear our prayers today and always.

**Sung refrain: “Sing, children of Zion, God comes to bring us home”**

We are grateful for the joys that enliven our world: laughter shared, beauty perceived, and hope renewed. Sometimes these moments bring relief and sometimes longing for what we lack. Receive our prayers that when we feel outcast from joy we may be renewed by your comforting presence.

**Sung refrain: “Sing, children of Zion, God comes to bring us home”**

We call out to you to behold the land and creatures of our world struck down by disaster [name a few places and people affected by such calamities as war, famine, or ecological crises]. Help us to remove reproach, end oppression, and bring healing.

**Sung refrain: “Sing, children of Zion, God comes to bring us home”**

Gather us in, O God, that we may give praise and glory to your name, that renewed in your love, we may repent and rejoice and be glad, honouring all creation in our hearts, words, and deeds.

**Sung refrain: “Sing, children of Zion, God comes to bring us home.”**

We ask all these things in Jesus’ name, who taught us to pray together [here use the Lord’s prayer in the version and language most familiar to you].

## God Sends Us

### Sending Hymn

MV#40 “Never Ending Joy”

### Benediction/Blessing

May we go forth into the world to share defiant joy with all God’s beloved creation.

Choral Amen

“As We Leave” by Lisa Waites[[5]](#footnote-5)

### Visual Worship Ideas

Since this week’s colour is pink, try draping the table beneath the advent wreath in a shimmery pink fabric. Among the chains from last week or around the wreath, add small signs reading “JOY!” and “REJOICE!” Add a symbol of the snake with its tail in its mouth to support a positive reading of vipers in Luke 3:7.

### Additional Resources for Advent 3

“Blessing to Summon Rejoicing” in *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* by Jan Richardson (Orlando, FL: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015), 45–46. (This selection would also be appropriate for a Blue Christmas/Longest Night service.)

“For Joy” (based on Luke 1:44) in *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* by Jan Richardson (Orlando, FL: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015), 58

“Sometimes I Cry” by Kathy Galloway, in *Shine On, Star of Bethlehem: A Worship Resource Compiled for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*, by Geoffrey Duncan, ed., 3rd ed (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2004), 184. Up to five selections in total from this book may be reprinted and shared for non-commercial worship purposes among United Church of Canada congregations during Advent 2024, with the kind permission of Canterbury Press.

1. The sheet music for “As We Light This Candle” is available on united-church.ca/worship-theme/advent-unwrapped. Permission is hereby granted for non-commercial use (live worship services and online streaming/recording of worship) throughout Advent 2024, but please do report all use of this hymn to OneLicense. Beyond Advent 2024, please contact the composer by emailing lisa.waites1@gmail.com [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The musical accompanist could quietly play a verse or two of the opening hymn while the people are Passing the Peace, thereby helping the congregation to become familiar with the melody and rhythms before singing aloud. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This hymn can be adapted to suit the theme of the service. For Advent 3C, the lyric becomes “Come now, O God of joy, we are your people …” The following week, love will be used in place of joy. If a longer musical response is desired, the worship leader could build from one verse (hope) on Advent 1C, then sing two verses (hope, peace) on Advent 2C, and on Advent 3 C (hope, peace, joy), adding one additional verse each Sunday. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Crip time” is a concept from Critical Disability Theory that acknowledges the experiences of disabled and neurodivergent people whose pace of living and energy for daily activities differ from those of able-bodied people. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Music and lyrics written by Lisa Waites. The music for this choral amen has been provided in Piano-Voice-Guitar format, and permission is hereby granted for non-commercial use in UCC settings (live worship and recorded/streamed digital worship) using the “Advent lyrics” during Advent 1C through 4C, and the “Christmas Eve lyrics” on December 24th. Please do report each use of this service music to OneLicense. To continue accessing this music after Christmas Eve 2024, please contact the composer by emailing her at lisa.waites1@gmail.com [↑](#footnote-ref-5)