

The Presbyterian Church of Okemos
December 14, 2025
Third Sunday of Advent
Lighting the Candle of Joy



Gathering As a People of God

Preparation: “Expansion was the call, and against its many risks, the mother of God said yes—stretching her body as well as her imagination for just what kind of hope this might be, growing now within her. ... We stretch by reaching toward each other—by reaching out from the solo act into the plural “we,” the pronoun God loves most. Life is long, the feast is wide, and we are meant for keeping it together. Our hearts are a muscle made in the image of God, made for connection. And there are so many ways of being kindred.” – Author Stephanie Duncan Smith, *Expanding Beyond Ourselves*, December 1, 2025; Center for Action and Contemplation

Invitation to Our Shared Ministry

Pastor Lisa Schrott

Prelude

Prelude on *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*
Dr. Marlene Brewbaker, organ

Charles Callahan

Choral Introit

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (verse 6)
PCO Chancel Choir
Shelby Laird, director

*** Call to Worship**

Ellen Hoekstra, Liturgist

One: We gather together in this place:

All: prophets and dreamers, singers and poets,

One: we who dare to imagine a world renewed;

All: we who dare to dream God’s dream.

One: We sing with Elizabeth and Mary.

All: Our spirits rejoice in God, our savior!

One: We bless the God of justice and joy,

All: who lifts up the lowly and vulnerable.

One: God’s mercy is upon us all,

All: from generation to generation.

One: Come and worship, all you who dream and wait.

All: We have come to wonder and praise

*** Hymn # 100**

My Soul Cries Out with a Joyful Shout, vs. 1-4
[Star of the County Down]

Advent Candle Lighting

Bill and Barbara Given

Opening Prayer

God of surprises, you interrupt our world with joy and hope beyond our wildest dreams. When we feel forgotten or despair, bless us with your holy joy. When our world feels barren, bless us with the gift of possibility. We pray as people of deep faith, entrusting ourselves and our world to the holy unknown, brought to birth in Jesus, our light and life. Amen.

One: The birth of Jesus has been told and retold a thousand times and in a thousand ways.

All: Its impact cannot be contained in any one perspective. The element of the story we focus on changes how we hear it, how we imagine it, and how we experience it.

One: Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine two cousins embracing and sharing life-changing news with one another. ...

... A joy our world needs to experience this season, not to hide from what is wrong, but to strengthen God's people to bear a world that is not right.

All: Today, we light the candle of joy because joy sustains us in the midst of uncertainty
(The candle of Joy is lit.)

Advent Response

We Are a People of Joy

Barbara Hamm

[Table of Grace]

The response will be played through once, the congregation will join in the second time.

We are a people of joy;

we are a people of joy.

Lighting a candle, we watch for the dawn;

we are a people of joy.

Prayer of Confession

Pastor Lisa Schrott

One: Answering the invitation of God, who loves justice and promises us mercy, let us confess our sin.

All: God of joy, you created this world for joy and flourishing. We confess that we construct barriers to protect our happiness, even at the expense of others. We fill ourselves with good things, taking no heed of those who are left empty. We ignore oppression when it benefits our interests. We dismiss the brokenhearted when we feel inconvenienced. We crave power over liberation. Remember us in compassion and come to our aid. Tear down our dividing walls. Scatter our pride and reawaken the imagination of our hearts. Lead us again in the work of repair and restoration. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Promise of the Gospel and Passing of the Peace

Pastor Lisa Schrott

One: God clothes you in salvation and covers you in righteousness. Rejoice and take heart: in grace, you are forgiven, through the saving love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

All: We give thanks to God for everything: forgiveness, hope, new life. Amen.

One: Where two or three of us are gathered, the prophetic Spirit is among us, inspiring our imagination and creating peace in our midst. Greet your fellow travelers now with the peace of Christ, and let these small doses of repair and reconciliation ripple out into a world in need of transformation.

All: And also with you. Please greet your fellow worshippers in ways you feel comfortable.

*** Act of Praise #583**

Glory to God

[Gloria, Gloria]

The response will be played through once, the congregation will join in the second time.

Glory to God, glory to God,

glory in the highest!

Glory to God, glory to God,

alleluia, alleluia!

The Word

Prayer of Illumination

Ellen Hoekstra, Liturgist

God of whispers and shouts, you proclaim the good news of joy from all corners of creation. As we turn to our scriptures, may the words inspire us to dream of a world where joy thrives among us. Amen.

Children's Sermon & Time of Wonder

Pastor Lisa Schrott

First Scripture Reading

Isaiah 61:1–4

Ellen Hoekstra, Liturgist

One: The Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God.

Second Scripture Reading

Luke 1:39–55

Pastor Lisa Schrott

One: The Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Unexpected Joy

Pastor Lisa Schrott

*** Affirmation of Joy**

Pastor Lisa Schrott

One: Let us affirm God's gift of life-giving and justice-seeking joy.

All: We believe "joy is the justice we give ourselves."

One: Because God's joy dwells with the humble and is rooted in justice, we find its warmth and light shine brightest through shared witness and sacred disruption.

All: We believe joy grows through blessing others and fostering authentic relationships. We believe joy is more than a feeling or the things we possess. Joy is our faith made visible and something we share by choosing connection.

One: We believe true joy is not the opposite of heartache, but lives right within the swirl of our grief and hardest emotions. We celebrate the depth of God's joy and how it can hold our pain.

All: We believe joy is freedom and healing, redemption and return. We believe joy comes from knowing God is close, even when life is hard. God's joy shows up not just in breathtaking beauty but in moments we hurt so much we can't breathe.

One: We choose justice. We choose love. We choose each other.

All: We choose joy.

Special Music

Gesù Bambino
Amira Coleman, soloist
PCO Chancel Choir
Shelby Laird, director

Pietro A. Yon
arr. Patrick Liebergen

Responding to the Word

Minute for Mission

Simbolei Academy

Ellen Hoekstra

Offering

Pastor Lisa Schrott

Invitation

Offertory

Voluntary on *Savior of the Nations, Come*
Dr. Marlene Brewbaker, organist

Charles Callahan

*Doxology #606

*Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Ellen Hoekstra, Liturgist

One: Gracious God,

All: may we be bearers of joy, carrying good news, blessing one another for this journey we share.

The Lord's Prayer

in unison

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sent Out As a People of God

* Hymn #106

Prepare the Way, O Zion, vs. 1-3
[Bereden Väg För Herran]

* Charge and Benediction

There is joy in centering the voices of those typically unheard. So go forth from this place with ears to hear, and believe the cries of women, immigrants, elders, and all who are vulnerable and silenced. May we be strengthened not just to hear and believe, but to act, for there is no greater joy than ensuring that all God's children need not cry out any longer.

Postlude

Procession on *Wake, Awake*
Dr. Marlene Brewbaker, organ

Charles Callahan

* Please rise in body or spirit

Ushers: Jeff & Michele Arbour, Gary & Trudy Sturk

This Morning's Fellowship Team: Thank you to Parish Life for supplying birthday cake as we celebrate our December birthdays! Thank you also to Edward Ennen for taking care of the coffee.

Education Hour:

Youth Instrumental Choir Rehearsal in the Chapel

Intergenerational Bible Study (High School and Adults): Colaborate New Testament Series with Roy Meland in the Board Room

Adult Ed. *Isaiah in Advent.* We will discuss the context for the use of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah's words in the season of Advent. Facilitated by Pastor Lisa in Fellowship Hall.

Next Week: December 21, 2025 Fourth Sunday in Advent

All Ages Christmas Pageant - *A Child Shall Lead Them*

Our Advent Worship Liturgy *The Will to Dream* is from Illustrated Ministry, 2025.

<https://store.illustratedministry.com/collections/the-will-to-dream>

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Dr. Marlene Brewbaker, Organist
Shelby Laird, Chancel Choir Director
Irene Shutt, Handbell Choir Director
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