

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
14 December 2025
Advent 3

The Gathering of the People of God

WELCOME & GREETING

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

And also with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

As we gather, we acknowledge that we meet on the lands of the Biddegal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners who have tended and cared for this land since time immemorial. We pay our respects to elders past and present and commit to walking together seeking truth, justice, treaty and reconciliation.

KUC VISION STATEMENTS

Let us say together who we are.

*We are a congregation
who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles,
who create a safe place for the community
and who share the journey of life and faith.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today we come to worship on the third Sunday of Advent — the Sunday of Joy.
We come with hope, with longing, and with open hearts.
Even when joy feels far away, God meets us here.

*We come to worship the God who sees us, remembers us,
and walks with us. We come to receive joy.*

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

ADVENT CANDLE: Hope & Peace & Love

We have lit the first two candles, one for hope and one for peace. Today, we light the third candle, the candle of joy. This should be the easy one, because joy is all around us—in the children, the lights, the music, the gathering together. But how often do we let our preparations—or our memories—push joy aside? Joy is like an underground spring that wells up within us, but joy is also a choice, an attitude. Like a muscle, it needs to be exercised. Today, we open ourselves to joy, trusting that God has already planted it within us. All we need to do is give it care and offer it to share.

Three candles are lit.

HYMN: O-So-So Advent Wreath Version

Come now, O God of hope, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.

Come now, O God of hope, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.

Come now, O God of peace, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.

Come now, O God of peace, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.

Come now, O God of joy, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.

Come now, O God of joy, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.

Melody and Korean © Geonyong Lee, Seoul, Korea. English: Marion Pope
Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

OPENING PRAYER

***Loving God, we open ourselves to you, trusting that this is how you made us.
You created us for joy-filled hearts and lives.
Show us the creative power of hope.
Teach us the peace that comes from justice.
Fill us with the kind of joy that cannot be contained but must be shared.***

*Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you,
that we may walk in the light of Christ. Amen.*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

*Gracious God,
We confess that we sometimes lose sight of joy.
We worry.
We fear.
We carry heavy burdens.
We forget that You are near.
Have mercy on us.
Renew our hearts and restore our joy. Amen.*

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news:
God is with us.
God forgives us.
God restores us and fills us with joy.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

HYMN: Joyful, joyful, we adore you TiS 152
Joyful, joyful, we adore you,
God of glory, God of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before you
opening to the sun above.

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
drive the dark of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day.

All your works with joy surround you,
earth and heav'n reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
centre of unbroken praise.

Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
singing bird and flowing fountain
call to praise you joyfully.

You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
well-spring of the joy of living,
ocean-depth of happy rest.

You our Father, Christ our brother,
all are yours who live in love;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to your joy above.

PD; text, Henry Van Dyke

Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 35:1–10

1 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. 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.

Luke 1:46–55

46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; 50 indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. 54 He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

REFLECTION

Today is the third Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Joy. What comes to your mind first when you hear the word joy? When was the last time you really felt joy? What was it? Honestly, when I first heard the word joy, I had to stop and think for a long time. I looked back over my life and tried to remember the moments of joy—when I really felt it. And to be honest, I found that the hard times came to my mind more easily than the joyful times. The life I had in Korea before coming to Australia, the life as a migrant after arriving here... so many memories and challenges came to my thoughts. And if we are honest, joy does not feel close for many people today. Some of us feel tired. Some feel lonely. Some feel stressed because everything is expensive. Some are worried about work, or health, or children. Some feel lost in a new country. And some feel like joy is a beautiful idea, but far away from real life. So today, I want to speak about real joy. Not fake joy. Not “put on a smile” joy. Not “everything is fine” joy. But the kind of joy that God gives—a joy that can stand even in hard times.

When we open the Bible today, we meet a young woman named Mary. Her life was not easy. She was poor. She was from a small town that nobody respected. She was pregnant before marriage, which could bring shame, judgment, and fear. Her future was uncertain. Nothing was secure. But in that difficult place, Mary sings one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. She says, “My soul praises the Lord... because God has looked at me. God has remembered me.” Mary teaches us something important: Joy is not the result of perfect circumstances. Joy comes when we realize that God sees us. God remembers us. God is close to us. Even when life feels heavy. Mary’s song is not a sweet, quiet song you sing before sleep. It is a strong and powerful song about who God is. She says that God brings down the proud, and lifts up the humble. God feeds the hungry. God stands with the weak. God turns the world upside down. This is a God who creates a new world, a just world, a fair world. Mary’s joy is not small. Mary’s joy is a joy that has justice inside it. When God comes

near, lives begin to change. This is why Mary sings. And this is why Advent gives us joy.

The prophet Isaiah also gives us a picture of this joy. He says that when God comes, the desert will bloom like a flower. Weak hands will grow strong. Blind eyes will open. People who cannot walk will dance. There will be a highway of holiness where the redeemed walk with singing. And sadness and sorrow will flee away. This is joy. Not the joy of perfect circumstances. But the joy of God's healing, God's presence, and God's promise of justice. But today, when we look at our world, it can be hard to believe. We see war. We see violence. We see the cost of living rising. We see people struggling to pay rent. We see racism and discrimination. We see people who feel lonely and forgotten. Many live far from family. Many miss home. Many work long hours just to survive. And some of us sit here today carrying heavy hearts. And let me share something simple from my own life. Not long ago, I went into the city. Before COVID, we used to see homeless people here and there. But this time, it felt very different. I saw so many more—far more than before—sitting on the streets, sleeping in corners, asking for help. And I asked myself, why? What is happening? And honestly, I think it is because life has become so hard. After COVID, everything became more expensive. Food prices went up. Transport costs went up. Rent became unbelievably high. Many people simply could not keep up. And when life becomes too heavy, when there is no support, some people end up with nowhere to go. No home. No safety. No joy. So how do we talk about joy in a world like this? How can we be a Joy Sunday people in a world that often feels joyless? One day at the Kogarah Storehouse food distribution, an older woman received two bags of food. She was walking out of the church, and I said to her, "God bless you. Have a wonderful day today." She stopped, turned around, and came back to me. Tears came to her eyes. And she said, "Thank you... not just for the food. Thank you for remembering me." Her joy was not about the apples or oranges, or even the bread. It was about being seen. Being valued. Being remembered. People often feel joy not because all their problems are solved, but because someone is holding their hand. That is the kind of joy God brings. A joy that begins with love. A joy that begins with someone saying, "I see you. You matter." Mary's song teaches us that God sees people like her. People like that old woman. People like you. People who sometimes feel small, tired, or overlooked. God sees us. And when God sees us, joy begins. This is Christian joy.

And so today, as we light the candle of Joy, we are not saying, "Everything is perfect." We are saying, "God is with us. God remembers us. God is coming to heal and restore. God is creating a new world." And because of that, we can sing—even with tears. We can stand—even when tired. We can love—even when life is hard. We can bring joy to others—even as we wait for God to finish his work. So today I want to invite you to think about one question:

Who is someone God is asking you to bring joy to this week?
Maybe a lonely neighbour.
Maybe a friend who feels stressed.
Maybe a family member who needs comfort.
Maybe someone at church who sits alone.
Maybe someone who needs to hear, "You are remembered."
Or maybe... it is you.
Joy is a gift God gives us. But joy is also a gift we give to the world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ! Remember this! Mary's joy began in a difficult place, but God met her there. And God meets us in our difficult places too. He meets us in our fears, in our worries, in our loneliness, in our sorrow. He meets us and says, "I see you. I remember you. I am with you. And I am making all things new."

This is our Advent joy.
This is the joy the world cannot take away.
And this is the joy we are called to share.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN Star-Child Seasons 1-31

Star-Child, earth-Child, go-between of God,
love Child, Christ Child, heaven's lightning rod,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!

Street child, beat child, no place left to go,
hurt child, used child, no one wants to know,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!

Grown child, old child, memory full of years,
sad child, lost child, story told in tears,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!

Spared child, spoiled child, having, wanting more,
wise child, faith child, knowing joy in store,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!

Hope-for-peace Child, God's stupendous sign,
down-to-earth Child, Star of stars that shine,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!

© 1992, Shirley Erena Murray

Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

CHRISTMAS BOWL

Our focus this week is Indonesia, a country where many communities live with the constant threat of extreme weather: floods, storms, and rising seas. This is Eko. He lives in Central Sulawesi with his family, where repeated flooding has destroyed their rice fields and wiped out crops they depend on. Through support from the Christmas Bowl and our local partner, Church World Service, Eko joined the DREAM program, a project that helps farming families adapt to climate change. He learned new techniques to grow stronger crops with fewer losses. He gained access to tools and training that reduce farming costs and improve yields. As we continue through Advent, I invite you to add your gift to the Bowl. To join your generosity with the compassion of generations before you.

This Christmas, I invite you to: Learn more about the people who you are helping to support through the Christmas Bowl. Pray for the needs of our world and Act for Peace's local partners. And to act: Every offering, every prayer, every act of kindness becomes part of Christ's reign breaking into the world, restoring lives and planting hope where it's needed most. This week, we invite you to pray for communities in Indonesia who are working hard to overcome the impacts of climate change and extreme weather. Thank you for joining with communities in Indonesia, and around the world, through your prayers, compassion, and support for the Christmas Bowl. In this Advent season of joy, we give thanks that even in the face of hardship, hope continues to grow — often through simple acts of generosity and solidarity like this one. Your participation helps families build resilience, find stability, and glimpse a future filled with promise. Thank you for being part of this story.

OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

Generous God,
we thank you for all that you have given us.
As we offer these gifts,
use them to bring hope, justice, and joy into the world.
Bless each giver and every gift.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Let us pray.

God of hope and joy,
we lift our world to you.

Where there is war, bring peace.

Where there is violence, bring healing.

Where people are hungry, bring provision.

Where people are homeless, bring shelter.

Where there is injustice, bring change.

We pray for our communities and our church.

Be near to those who feel lonely or forgotten.

Strengthen those who are tired or overwhelmed.

Comfort those who are grieving

and guide those who are facing uncertainty.

We pray for ourselves.

Fill our hearts with your joy.

Help us to trust you in difficult times

and to be signs of your love in this world.

We also pray for those in our church who are unwell, sick, sad or lonely.

In silence let us remember them.

(Silent)

Surround them with your peace and healing.

Give them strength for each day

and remind them that you are always with them.

We offer all these prayers

in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.*

***Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.***

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

INVITATION

Come to this table:
you who have much faith,
and you who would like to have more;
you who have been to this sacrament often,
and you who have not been for a long time;
you who have tried to follow Jesus,
and you who have failed.

Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

COMMUNION HYMN: Let us talents and tongues employ TiS 537

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy;
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Christ is able to make us one,
at the table he sets the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share;

God-Immanuel everywhere.

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,

pass the Word around: loaves abound!

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,

pass the Word around: loaves abound!

© 1975 Hope Publishing Company; words, Frederik Herman Kaan
Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also be with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

With joy we praise you, gracious God,
for you have created heaven and earth,
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—
even when we fell into sin.

We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,
whose coming opened to us the way of salvation
and whose triumphant return we eagerly await.

Therefore we join our voices
with all the saints and angels and the whole creation
to proclaim the glory of your name.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

You are holy, O God of majesty,
and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

You sent him into this world
to satisfy the longings of your people for a Savior,
to bring freedom to the captives of sin,
and to establish justice for the oppressed.

He came among us as one of us,
taking the lot of the poor, sharing human suffering.

We rejoice that in his death and rising again,
you set before us the sure promise of new life,
the certain hope of a heavenly home
where we will sit at table with Christ, our host.

We remember, on the night of his betrayal, that Jesus took bread,
giving thanks, and broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take, eat.

This is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper, he also took the cup and said:
Drink from this all of you.

This is my blood shed for you and for the whole world
for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this in remembrance of me."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Strengthen us, O God, in the power of your Spirit
to bring good news to the poor and lift blind eyes to sight,
to loose the chains that bind and claim your blessing for all people.
Keep us faithful in your service until Christ comes in final victory
and we shall feast with all your saints in the joy of your eternal realm.
Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour are yours, almighty God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.
The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.
The gifts of God for the people of God.

LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God,
Have mercy on us.
Jesus, bearer of our sins,
Have mercy on us.
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
Grant us peace.

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Gracious God,
we thank you for this holy meal.
Thank you for feeding us
with the love and grace of Jesus Christ.
As we leave this table,
fill us with your joy and peace.
Send us out to live as your people,
sharing your love with the world.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Sending Forth of the People of God

HYMN: You shall go out with joy TiS 755 (Sing twice)

You shall go out with joy and be led forth in peace,
and the mountains and the hills shall break forth in singing.
There'll be shouts of joy, and the trees of the field
shall clap, shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and you'll go out with joy.

© 1975 Lillenas Publishing Co

Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

BLESSING

Go into the world as people of joy.
Not because everything is perfect,
but because God is with you,
God goes before you,
and God delights to give you joy.

And the blessing of God almighty,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

SENDING SONG: May God's blessing

May God's blessing surround you each day,
as you trust Him and walk in His way.
May His presence within
guard and keep you from sin,
go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

© 1982 Cliff Barrows

Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150