

3 THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE

The first and second candles are lit before the service begins.

One: In times like ours, joy can be hard to summon.

Many: In times like ours, joy can be hard even to imagine.

One: And still the season beckons us to make merry.

Many: And yet the scriptures tell us to “rejoice always.”

One: It sounds almost ludicrous.

Many: It borders on outrageous.

One: How can we rejoice under the burden of so much injustice?

Many: How can we rejoice under the pall of so much death?

One: It's enough to make those who are alone feel lonely

Many: It's enough to make the grieving or depressed feel sadder still.

One: But ours is not a joy dependent on circumstances.

Many: Our joy is not derived from measurable outcomes.

One: Advent invites us to rejoice in God's goodness.

Many: Even as we watch and wait and aren't sure what's coming.

One: Advent invites us to rejoice in all the ways God's love is with us.

Many: Even as it empowers us to be true to all we feel.

One: It won't be long now 'til the blessed babe is born.

Many: We rejoice in the true light shining its way into the world.

The third candle is lit. Silence is kept.

ALL: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS, MAY OUR JOY BE FULL.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess, O God, that we spend far too much of ourselves chasing happiness, which often leaves us wanting. Even as we await your coming, you wait for us to come home to you: to your dream for the world, to your love made flesh, to your joy overflowing. Forgive us, and grace us with an ever-deepening capacity for joy. We rejoice in your mercy for all. Amen.

CALL TO THE OFFERING

When Esther's Uncle Mordecai suggested that she had come to the king's court "for such a time as this," conditions were grim. The king of Persia, prompted by his evil aide Haman, had issued a royal decree for the massacre of all Jews in the land. In the end, Queen Esther risked her life to save the lives of her people. Things aren't quite so bad for the beloved clergy and staff retirees of the United Church of Christ, but times are hard. The Christmas Fund is a lifeline for retired servants of the church who need help paying health insurance premiums, regular bills, and emergency expenses. For just such needs, at just this time, we have the opportunity to give to the special Christmas Fund offering. Inspired by Esther and motivated by love, let's be generous.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

We come with joy, O God, rejoicing in our capacity to give, grateful for the ministries and the ministers of the United Church of Christ. Take our gifts, and make of them blessings. Take our gifts, and make them instruments of life. To the One who can do much with little, to the One who can do more than we can ask or imagine, we offer our thanks and praise. Amen.