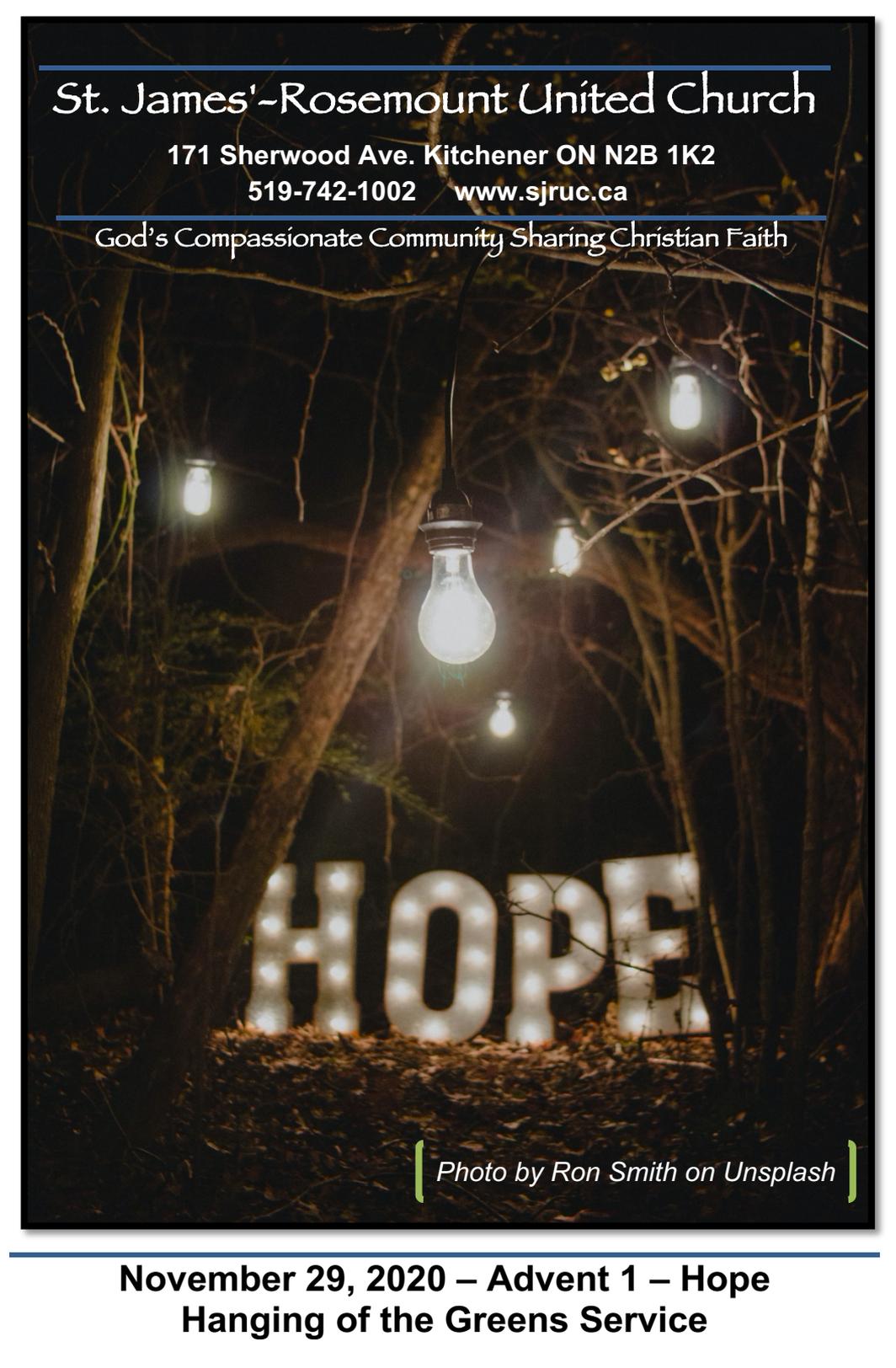

St. James'-Rosemount United Church

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God's Compassionate Community Sharing Christian Faith



HOPE

Photo by Ron Smith on Unsplash

**November 29, 2020 – Advent 1 – Hope
Hanging of the Greens Service**

Welcome!

Welcome to worship! We're glad you're here!

WE GATHER IN GOD'S HOPE

VU: Voices United

MV: More Voices

* Please remain seated for all of service.*

We would like to acknowledge that we are on the Haldimand Tract, traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Welcome & Announcements

Prelude

Opening Hymn Once in Royal David's City VU 62

1 *Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattleshed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed.
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.*

2 *He came down to earth from heaven
who, with God, is over all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall.
There among the poor and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.*

3 *For he is our lifelong pattern;
daily, when on earth he grew,
he was tempted, scorned, rejected,
tears and smiles like us he knew.
Thus he feels for all our sadness,
and he shares in all our gladness.*

Call to Worship

One: We are told to prepare the way –
but our motivation is different this year.
Gatherings may be smaller or non-existent,
sadness may take the place of gladness,
but still, the promises of God are about to be
born. In us, through us, and with us.
God's hope comes to a waiting world.
So let us prepare the way, even though it feels
like going through the motions.
Let us decorate our homes, light our candles,
and welcome the presence of God.

Lighting our Advent Wreath – Hope

One: The Advent wreath is a sign that we await the
light of Christ in our lives. Over the last year, people
around the world have struggled with the pandemic
and understand just how dim the light can be in
times like these. In lighting this candle candles, we
thank God for giving us: Hope

One: In faith, we know that “we are not alone”.
Christ stands by us and brings us salvation. We take
this moment to think of those who are sick or carry
grief in this time. May they find hope!

Light the first purple candle – Hope

Candle Lighting Hymn – Hope is a Star VU 7

*Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.*

When God is a child there's joy in our song.

*The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong
and none shall be afraid.*

Opening Prayer *adapted from a prayer by Rev. Kelly Fitzgerald*

One: God-with-us, we have a long list of things we want to see in this Christmas Season. Experiences we want to have, feelings we want to feel, friends and family we want to hug, songs we want to sing, and even cookies we want to eat. We hold all that before you today...knowing how much we're unable to do, for this will be a season unlike any other.

But still, Christmas will come. You still show up in our world and fill us with awe and wonder. You will once again renew our hearts and minds to fully hope, to express unconditional love, to share contagious joy, and find peace — peace that passes all understanding.

We release to you the ghosts of Christmas past, of good and not-so-good memories and ask for the Spirit to fill us with energy and imagination for the Christmas that is to come. In your holy name, Amen.

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

Introduction to "Hanging the Greens"

This is the start of the new year, the start of our preparations for welcome the Christ child into our lives. The Prophet Isaiah imagined this time of preparations: *in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert, a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low...then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed...*

We call this start, this time of getting ready, Advent. It means coming. I like how Advent sounds like

adventure – that God is inviting us on this new adventure!

Christmas is coming, and Advent helps us get ready. Advent changes the face of the earth – the desert, the valley, the mountains and hills, the world gets ready, and we should too! Advent changes our church, as this morning we'll make it look like Christmas – we'll get the garlands hung, and the tree decorated, we'll sing some carols and try to get our hearts ready for Christmas.

Because Advent changes our hearts...all year long, we rush from one thing to the next, but in Advent we slow down...we watch as Mary and Joseph make the long journey on the donkey. We watch as shepherds on the hillside, move from their forgotten lives, to being witnesses to God doing a new thing...we watch as wise ones make a multiple year journey to worship this child, this Emmanuel, this God-with-us. And the gift of this season, in amongst the busyness, is that we have time to enter into this story, and hear again, how God comes to us anew.

This service is called a *hanging of the greens*, and it's when we **hang** our **greens**, our branches of evergreen trees, our wreaths, decorating our homes for the coming Christ.

Symbols: Greens, Wreaths, and Poinsettias

Green represents new life, freshness, renewal, and rebirth. Have you ever looked outside this time of year, when all of the leaves have fallen from the trees, yet the evergreens, still bring colour into our washed-out lives. Plants such as pine, fir, holly, ivy,

and mistletoe are called evergreens because they do not die; through the seasons of the year, they remain ever-green. Ever-alive. It is no wonder then that we fill our sanctuary, and our homes with evergreens during this Advent season. Advent is the season of preparation for the ever-coming Christ, God's gift of love that is present to us in every season of our life. And even though we celebrate Jesus coming into our lives at this special time of year, it's a good reminder that we should **ever-celebrate** the way our lives experience new life.

That's why we hang our wreaths of evergreens too – there's no beginning or end to a circle. That's a sign of how God's love never ends in our lives...it always is...and we give thanks.

Poinsettias

In this season you'll see poinsettias in homes, and unlike almost everything else which has European roots, the poinsettia, which looks like a flaming star, is a native to the American continent, reminding us that Christmas is celebrated the world round. It was named after Dr. Joel Robert Poinset, an ambassador to Mexico who first introduced it to the United States in 1828. The people of Mexico and Central America call the brilliant tropical plant the "Flower of the Holy Night," and it has become a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem.

Many times in our lives we feel absolutely alone, so as we bring in these symbols of God's presence always with us, I invite you to think how this Christmas season is different for most of us -

remembering that even though we're apart, we're not alone.

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-6

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the
wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie
down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a
little child shall lead them.

Symbols: Angels and Stars

At the start of our Christmas stories, the angels -
which is another word for messengers - came to
announce that God is doing a new thing in their
lives.

THIS WAS ABSOLUTELY TERRIFYING!

We know this because the angels say, *Do not be afraid...* it's almost the first thing out of their mouths.

The angels remind us that even though Joseph and Mary's world is about to change, that Zechariah and Elizabeth's world is about to change, the shepherd's world is about to change...that they should not be afraid. Easier said than done!

But we are to trust, even though the mountains and hills change, even though our Christmases might change, that God never changes, and is always with us. This is what the angels remind Joseph and Mary. God is with them. God has chosen them. God has blessed them. And we have angels in our lives, who remind us of the same things. God is with us. God has chosen us. God has blessed us.

In the dark and changing times of our lives, there is hope in the light that comes, in the stars that lead the way. While we have GPSs and maps, it was the stars that gave hope to ancient travellers. And just as the angels pointed those in a new direction, stars showed the way to those seeking Jesus, as they saw in the sky, signs that the world was different.

In this Christmas season, we are grateful for those that tell us things that we're not ready to hear, and ones that give us direction. So as we bring in these symbols of God's leading presence, I invite you to think about those who have shown you the way.

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-24

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged

to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife

Hymn: Angels we have heard on high v1,2 VU38

1 Angels we have heard on high
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

2 Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
which inspire your heavenly song?

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Symbol: Crèche

It was in the year 1223 that Francis of Assisi thought it would be particularly special to have a *live* nativity. Assisi is credited as a friend to animals, and so it would only make sense that he wanted to have sheep and donkey and ox alongside Mary and Joseph and the baby. It was the reminder that Jesus was born for the whole world, women and men, poor and rich, animal and human; this gift came for the whole world. This is why we have our crèche scene here today. The animals were the first to arrive, and they'll be here long after everyone goes home.

The wise ones waited for their sign...

The shepherds are out in the fields, just doing their job...

But the animals were the first there. I wonder if God sent an angel to them, saying *do not be afraid*, your world is about to be turned upside down...and all you need to do is offer love...and welcome...

Many of us are waiting patiently for change to come. We are not the excitable shepherds or the expectant parents, but the faithful ones, ready to open our hearts to those in need, so as we bring in these symbols of God coming to those who wait, I invite you to think about how you might open your heart in new ways this Christmas season.

Symbol: Christmas Tree

The story is told that on one Christmas Eve Martin Luther wandered outdoors and became enraptured with the beauty of the starry sky. Its brilliance and loveliness led him to reflect on the glory of the first

Christmas Eve as seen in Bethlehem's radiant skies. Wishing to share with his wife and children the enchantment he had felt, he cut from the forest an evergreen, glistening with snow, and took it home.

Just like the symbol of the greens – this is a sign of life, and the new life of Jesus that is born to us. But for many of us, we hold many difficult thoughts with us this (and possibly every) Christmas. There are those who are not able to celebrate Christmas. Those we love even though we've said goodbye. Those we are worry about, because of separation, or illness. Those who are alone. And so on this sign of life, and ever-present love, on this our Christmas tree, we hang our prayers, our wishes, our dreams.

Hymn: O Christmas Tree
Musical Reflection & Decorating the Tree

Symbol: Light

On that first Christmas tree, Martin Luther placed candles upon the branches to represent the light that shines in this dark season. The use of a candle-lit tree spread to all Europe, then America came to regard it as the central ornament of Christmas. To this day the lights upon our trees remind us of the star that pointed the way for the wise ones. They shine as light in our darkness. As the world around us moves quickly towards Christmas, as the feelings of worry and uncertainty of what this covid Christmas might bring, as we lose heart with the many ways that we will not be able to honour the traditions of we love...these lights shine.

Shine in us, that we may bear light for others in these difficult times. Show us a better way to walk together. Brightly illumine our paths to reveal that we do not walk alone. Remind us that the light of Jesus arrives, just when we need it the most...

Because...

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2, 60:1-3

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Hymn O Come, O Come Emmanuel v1,2,6,7 VU 1

***1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lowly exile here
until the Son of God appear.***

***Refrain Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.***

***2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who orders all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.*** Refrain

6 *O come, O Dayspring, from on high,
and cheer us by your drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.* Refrain

7 *O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
O bid our sad divisions cease,
and be for us the Prince of Peace.* Refrain

Reflection (based on a recent reflection by Sarah Bessey)

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD AND LOVE

Invitation to Offering

(Donate online at sjruc.ca)

Offertory

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

WE GO OUT TO LOVE AND SERVE OTHERS

Carol I'll Be Home for Christmas

Commissioning

One: "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all." (Emily Dickinson)
May the song of hope be yours to sing, and may it be enough to not only lift your spirits, but encouraging enough for others to join.

Postlude

Announcements

Ornaments – if you didn't get a chance to put your loved ones name on the tree – please send a note to Rev. Chris and we'll be sure to place one for you!

Edna Rhoda – While it was a snowy day last Sunday, there were certainly warm wishes for Edna! She would like to thank everyone for the drive by and all the cards, flowers and best wishes as she celebrated 100 years thankful for love and friendship.

oneRoof – Thank you to all those who donated in support of oneRoof over the last month. If you forgot, don't worry, next week, December 6th is White Gift Sunday and we'll still take your donations! Speak to the office or Rev. Chris and we'll arrange a time for drop-off.

Advent Candles - We have purchased taper candles (3 purple, 1 pink, 1 white) for people to light Advent candles as we journey towards Christmas. If you're interested in a set of candles - please sign up here or email/call the office!

<https://forms.gle/si6VzD12TDHgJaRL7> (It will also ask if you're interested in filming yourself/your family with a cellphone or tablet reading the Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy that we can use in Sunday worship)

Turkey Trot - THE SEQUEL: SOLD OUT! Thank you to all those who made our second dinner a success! Pickup is Saturday, December 12 at SJR!

Breakfast with Santa - We will be planning a ZOOM Breakfast and Visit with Santa on December 12. Sign-up is live – here:

Lessons and Carols service – December 13th –
Join us for a special celebration of hymns and carols
and special guests as we explore the power of music!