

**December 13 Advent 3**  
**Children's program**  
**Good tidings of great joy**

**Prelude**

**Threshold Moment**

Throughout the scriptures there are stories of God sending angel messengers to bring news to God's people. There is no scriptural record of angels writing their own messages; they always are relaying a message directly from God. Sometimes the angels brought a warning; sometimes they appeared to bless someone. There were times when angels sent by God intervened in human activity; other times they worked unseen. And at other times, the angels simply sang for joy. In these times when fear may threaten to overwhelm us, hearing those two words, "fear not," can open the door to good news, to true joy. One of the loveliest parts of this season is the sweet pure joy of children – their delight and excitement are contagious, and often our own worries and fears are banished when we catch their joy. Today's message is a letter of joy, and today's worship includes the joyful story of the birth of Jesus, as told by our children.

*(Video with card and word falling out. Music underscore throughout)*

A letter from the angel Gabriel, with good tidings of great joy.

Dear church,

Fear not!

By all accounts, it is a terrifying thing to encounter an angel. Every angel message always starts by saying "Fear not." You see, frequently when I appear, there is a sense of doom mixed with awe and wonder at my appearance. And that is understandable. When I show up, it is a clear sign that God is up to something big.

When I came to that place near Bethlehem, and spoke to those shepherds, it was no different. Times were difficult for God's people; the Roman occupiers had power over every detail of their lives. And even though God had promised the Messiah, they had been waiting a very, very long time.

It probably seemed as if true joy was very far away.

But that night, as the shepherds tended to their sheep, an angel appear to them and spoke to them, assuring them of this good news that had come for them and for all people. It must have been a message they would remember and talk about forever.

Here is what the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!”

### **Song**

*Or Away in a Manger*

Away in a manger, no crib for His bed.  
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.  
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,  
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever and love me I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,  
And fit us for heaven to live with Thee there.

### **Call to Confession**

Friends, too often we fall prey to fear, when the better response would be to fall to our knees and pray. It is in prayerful connection with God that we find peace, and joy. Set aside your fears and enter into God’s grace as together we pray our prayer of confession.

### **Prayer of Confession**

Holy One, you send your messages of joy to us in so many ways, but we too often ignore them. We let our selfishness, our worries and our desires overtake us. We stare down at the dirt and disorder of our lives instead of lifting up our eyes to you, the source of our help! Forgive us, God. Take away our fear and our selfish longings, and embrace us in the joy that only you can give. Turn our faces toward heaven, so that we may hear the angels’ song. We pray in the name of the one born in Bethlehem. Amen.

*Silence is kept*

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Leader: Friends, there is no more need for fear and sorrow, for God in Jesus Christ has come to us, the Word made flesh, and in Christ we can know perfect forgiveness, perfect peace, and endless joy. Rejoice, people of God!

**People: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God! Amen!**

### **Song**

*Dona Nobis Pacem*

Dona nobis

Pacem, pacem

Dona nobis pacem.

(repeat 2x)

### **A Letter of Joy**

### **Children's Program**

### **Offertory**

If you are able, please continue to send in your offering and pledge. If you are enrolled in electronic funds transfer, there is no need to do anything different. If you would like to give online using Paypal, click this link: [bit.ly/FPCsterling](https://bit.ly/FPCsterling)

### **Prayer of Dedication**

Compassionate God, thank you that you are our strength and our song, and you fill our hearts with joy. May we give our offerings to you with gladness and joy. Everything we have belongs to you and we rejoice to give some of your abundant gifts back to you. Bless the tithes and offerings we give today. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer**

### **Songs**

*Joy to the World*

Joy to the world!

The Lord is come:  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,

And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

He rules the world  
with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,

And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, wonders of His love.

*Go Tell It On the Mountain*  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
Over the hills and everywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching  
O'er silent flocks by night,  
Behold throughout the heavens  
There shone a holy light.

Go, tell it on the mountain  
Over the hills and everywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!

Down in a lowly manger

The humble Christ was born.  
And God sent us salvation  
That blessed Christmas morn.

Go, tell it on the mountain  
Over the hills and everywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!

**Benediction**