Worship Service Theme: Third Sunday of Advent: JOY

Helpful Elements:
Christmas hymnal and sing-along recordings
Purple table covering
Advent stand and electric candles
Advent banner
Nativity scene (separate table)

Welcome: Welcome! My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. Today is the third Sunday of Advent. The word "advent" comes from the Latin word "adventus," which means "arrival" or "coming." Advent is the season before Christmas when the church remembers and celebrates the coming of Christ to Earth and looks forward to Jesus' return in glory.

(Turn on the candles of Hope, Peace, and Joy – or have someone in the front row "light" them.)
The first two Sundays of Advent, we lit the **PURPLE** candles of hope and peace. Purple is the traditional color for Advent, but today, the third week of Advent, we light the **PINK** candle of joy. In church tradition, pink represents joy. Pink is also associated with Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose joy in the Lord is our focus today.

With these candles, we remember how the birth of Jesus brought hope, peace, and joy into the world. Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening prayer: God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells among us.
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells among us.

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God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells among us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the center, the focus of our lives
always, and especially during this Advent season. We pray in your holy name. Amen.[1]

Hymns:
Joy to the World
O Come O Come Emmanuel

First reading: Isaiah 65:17-19

17 See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
18 But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.
19 I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:
It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
We Three Kings

Second reading: Luke 1:39-49. This story happens soon after the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her that she will be the mother of the Christ child.

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,**40** where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted her cousin Elizabeth. **41** When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb,

[1] http://faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm

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and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. **42** In a loud voice Elizabeth exclaimed:
"Blessed are you, Mary, among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!
43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** As
soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped
for joy. **45** Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises
to her!"
46 And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies the Lord
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name."

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:
Angels We Have Heard on High
Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

Interactive Homily: Let's talk more about joy.

- What are some things, events, and people that make you feel joyful?
    - *[generate lots of ideas! Children, grandchildren, spouses, friends, pets, places where you grew up or visited, birthdays, weddings …]*
- Mary, the mother of Jesus, is obviously a big part of the Christmas story. Earlier I read part of Mary's song after she meets with her cousin, Elizabeth. Let's think more about Mary, who overflows with joy in this scripture. Did Mary have reasons to be joyful? Hmm … what were Mary's actual circumstances at this time in her life? Mary was:
    - Unmarried
    - Young
    - Poor
    - And pregnant!
- How would you (or really anyone) probably feel in these circumstances?
    - A lot of uncertainty and fear; "what is going to happen to me??"
- But Mary bursts into a song of joy! I wonder why you think Mary was joyful in this moment?
    - She knows she is not alone. After the angel's visit, Mary immediately goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth speaks the Holy

Spirit's encouragement to Mary: "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Elizabeth assures Mary that God is *trustworthy* and that God is *with her*, past, present, and future.
    - Mary has certainty in God and trusts that God is doing great things for her.
- Mary sings, "God has been *mindful* of the humble state of his servant. *From now on* all generations will call me blessed." According to Mary, where is God and what is God doing?
    - God has not left Mary to buck up and fend for herself. She sings, "God has been mindful of *me*! All generations will call me *blessed* [that is, joyful/happy]!"
    - God is thinking about and guiding Mary all the time.
- What a great image and model for us! How can we live joyfully like Mary in the midst of challenging circumstances?
    - Like Mary, focus on God – not circumstances.
        - Mary sings, "My soul glorifies the Lord." Other translations say, "My soul *magnifies* the Lord." What happens when you magnify something?
            - It gets bigger – and everything outside the magnification gets smaller.
            - When you magnify the Lord, God gets bigger as worries and fears get smaller.
    - Like Mary, seek out support. Mary went to Elizabeth for help and encouragement. Get help from wise and godly people.
    - Like Mary, focus your mind and heart on your blessings right now.
    - Like Mary, believe God's promises of blessings to come.
    - Like Mary, magnify and glorify the Lord. Make God bigger in your sight! God's presence of love and peace can and will diminish despair, fear, and worry.
- God had great plans for Mary, and God has great plans for you. Like Mary, you are never alone or forgotten. You are *always* on the heart and mind of God because he loves you.

… Let's take a moment to silently pray and reflect on the joy of the Lord.

(Silent Prayer) … Lord, in your love and mercy, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Hymns:
Go Tell it on the Mountain
Away in a Manger

Third Reading: Poem, "True Joy" by M. Jolynn Rawson-Hunt (slightly edited)
"I'll be happy once I've done this certain thing":
We all say this often not realizing what it brings.
We look only to the future for our happiness,
Letting life slip through our fingers in its fullness.
Will we really feel complete when the task is done,
Or look back and see how we missed so much fun?
Self-consumed so we can't see anything else,
Hurting those we love as well as ourselves.
So often, others see what's in front of our face,
But we're too blind to look because we're snared in the race.
What is this life supposed to be about?
Is it money, fortune, fame, or a big house?
When speaking to a man on his dying bed,
None of those answers are what he said.
Family, love, laughter are true joy in the making;
God's precious gifts, free to all for the taking.

Hymn:
Here We Come A-Wassailing *(this happy song was sung by carolers as a blessing to the households they visited. Listen for the blessings in the song!)*

Fourth Reading: A few lighthearted moments of Joy 😇[2]
A kindergarten teacher was walking around her classroom while her students drew pictures. One little girl was scribbling so intently that the teacher asked what she was drawing. The little girl replied, "I'm drawing a picture of Jesus." The

[2] https://mustardseedthoughts.com/2016/04/13/sundays-sermon-today-laughter-joy-fruits-of-the-spirit/

teacher said, “Oh honey, nobody really knows for sure what Jesus looked like.” The little girl, without missing a beat, replied, “They will in a minute.”

After three adult sons left home, they discussed gifts they were able to give their elderly mother.

The first son said: “I built a big house for our mother.”

The second son said: “I sent Mom a fancy car with a driver.”

The third son said: “You remember how Mom enjoys reading the Bible. Now she can’t see very well. So I sent her a remarkable parrot that recites the entire Bible. It took elders in the church 12 years to teach the parrot. Mom just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot recites it.”

Soon after, their mother sent out her letters of thanks for these gifts.

To her first son, she said, “The house you built is so huge! I really live only in one room.”

To her second son, the mother said, “I love the car, but I’m afraid I’m too old to travel, so I rarely use the car.”

But to her third son, the mother said, “Son, your gift was great. The little chicken you sent was delicious!”

A little boy asked his Sunday School teacher about a question he had about the Children of Israel.
The little boy asked, “The Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?”
“Right,” said the teacher.
“And the Children of Israel beat up the Philistines, right?” the boy asked.
“Er–right,” the teacher answered.
“And the Children of Israel built the Temple, and fought the Egyptians, Romans, and many more, right?” the boy persisted.
“Again you’re right,” the teacher answered. “So what’s your question?”
“What I want to know is this,” demanded the little boy. “What were all the grown-ups doing?”

Hymn:
O Come All Ye Faithful

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)
The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymns:
We Wish You a Merry Christmas
O Holy Night

Extra material:

Isaiah 12:2-6
2 Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust and will not be afraid;
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation."
3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
4 And you will say in that day:
"Give thanks to the Lord,
call upon his name,
make known the Lord's deeds among the peoples,
proclaim that God's name is exalted.
5 "Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;
let this be made known in all the earth.
6 Shout, and sing for joy, …
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."