

# Service for the Longest Night

Thursday, December 21, 2023  
6:00 P.M.

FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

## PRELUDE

## OPENING LITANY

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

**The Word became flesh and lived among us,  
full of grace and truth, and we have seen his glory.**

In him was life, and that life was the light of all.

**The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has never been able to extinguish it.**

\*HYMN 121

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

ST. LOUIS

PSALM OF LAMENT

Psalm 27

Hymn 90

*The refrain is sung by all when indicated in the hymnal.*

## LIGHTING OF CANDLES AND LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light.

**We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.**

Sing: *O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lowly exile here until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*Silent Reflection and Prayer*

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to you, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands you will place the gift of peace, *shalom*.

**We remember that through you all things are possible.  
Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

Sing: *O come, strong branch of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell your people save and give them victory o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*Silent Reflection and Prayer*

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain.

We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

**We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed.  
We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, with the turning of the earth the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.**

Sing: *O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*Silent Reflection and Prayer*

We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the coming of Christ. We remember the loving God who came to share this life with us and promises us comfort and peace.

**We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.**

Sing: *O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind,  
Bid envy, strife, and discord cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*Silent Prayer and Reflection*

SILENT PRAYER, CANDLE LIGHTING, AND ANOINTING

*You are invited to come forward and light candles to represent your prayers. Those who wish may receive anointing with oil as a sign of blessing.*

READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 40: 28-31

Psalms 121 (read responsively)

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?  
**My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**  
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.  
**He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**  
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
**The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.**  
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.  
**The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore.**

Matthew 11:28-30

THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE AFFIRMATION OF HOPE

*"First Coming" by Madeleine L'Engle*

God did not wait until the world was ready, till people and nations were at peace.  
**God came when the Heavens were unsteady  
and prisoners cried out for release.**  
God did not wait for the perfect time.  
**God came when the need was deep and great.**

**God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.**

God did not wait till hearts were pure.

**In joy, God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt. To a world like ours,  
of anguished shame, God came and God's light would not go out.**

God came to a world which did not mesh; to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.

**In the mystery of the Word made flesh, the maker of the stars was born.**

We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
or to share our grief, to touch our pain.

**God came with love: Rejoice! Rejoice!**

\*HYMN 123

*It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

CAROL

\*CONCLUDING PRAYER AND BLESSING

**Another day will come, O God.**

**I know not what it may bring forth,  
but make me ready, God, for whatever it may be.**

**If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.**

**If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.**

**If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.**

**And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly.**

**Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of thy Peace.**

**Amen.**

O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. **Amen.**

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be kind and gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

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\*Rise in body or spirit