



[LONGEST NIGHT WORSHIP, DECEMBER 21, 2021](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by God and without God nothing came to be. What came to be through God was life, and this life was the Light of the world.

All respond: **The Light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

Peace Hymn: **“O Little Town of Bethlehem”** vs 1, 3, & 4

1 O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by;
yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

4 O holy child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in,
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!

Text: Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893

3 How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming;
but, in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still
the dear Christ enters in.

READINGS OF SCRIPTURE:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Psalm 22: 1-11

Darkness and the Light

Let us spend a brief time in darkness and silence. I invite you to sit in darkness and silence acknowledging your loss, your separation, any loneliness, or confusion you may have experienced or still are experiencing. The darkness can sometimes feel uncomfortable. Try to embrace it and let God walk you through it. Darkness and silence can be scary for us no matter what our age. Yet, in this time, it is our prayer that each of us begins to feel the silence of God's invitation to rest and be still. We begin to experience the darkness around us as the embrace of God. This God who is present; maybe even more in our times of pain and loss. This is God who promises it will not remain dark forever.

Tomorrow, there will be just a little more light than today. You may not have noticed, but slowly spring will come again. May it be in the same way as God brings the light of hope into your life, into our world.

After this brief time of dark and silence we will light the candles on the Altar, then the Advent wreath. This represents Christ is present with you...with us! At this time, you may choose to write down what is cause for your sadness and heartache today. I invite you to leave that with God at the Altar, either at home or here, in person.

READING: Psalm 23

Now, for a moment, engage your imagination. As you close your eyes imagine Jesus is coming into the room right now. He sees you and makes His way over to you. Notice how Jesus chooses to sit, stand or kneel. What is it that He wants to offer you right now? Simply allow Him to be with you however He chooses. Whether words, a facial expression, a gesture or simply His presence, allow yourself to be with Jesus in the silence of this moment then, (pause) We say...Amen

Our Hymn of Care: "What Child Is This?"

- 1 What child is this, who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary!
- 2 Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
the cross be borne for me, for you;
hail, hail the Word made flesh,
the babe, the son of Mary!
- 3 So bring him incense, gold and myrrh;
come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings;
let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
the virgin sings her lullaby;
joy, joy, for Christ is born,
The babe, the son of Mary!

Text: William C. Dix, 1837-1898

Musical Interlude is playing: as pastor moves to light the Altar candles and first candle of the Advent Wreath. "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

P: We light the 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.

All speak: We remember them with love. A time for Reflection:

We light the second candle on the Advent Wreath.

P: We light the second candle to remember the pain of loss.

The 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 our past, O God, and we offer it all to you asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

All speak: We remember that through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into the future. Silence for reflection.

We light the third candle.

P: We light the third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause to remember the past weeks, months and for some of us, years that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, and in this darkness; and in the knowledge of our own mortality.

All speak: We remember that although we have journeyed far, while lost, we may have even turned away from Your Light. The Light has not failed us. We remember that though the winter is upon us and though the night is dark, with the turning of Your Wheel the dawn defeating the darkness.

Silence for Reflection

The fourth candle is lit.

P: We light the fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and Christmas! These stories begin with abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, during a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who keeps the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with promises that comfort and give us peace.

All speak: We remember the One who shares our burdens, shows us the way to the Light and journeys with us into all our tomorrows. O come, desire of all nations, bind all our hearts into one heart for all humanity.

Silence for Reflection:

P: Let us pray.

P: God of all wisdom, we come to you this Advent/Christmas season tired, in turmoil and in pain. In this season of our longest night, we ask your healing blessing upon all that we carry in our hearts-sorrow we fear, may never end and wounds we cannot even put into words.

P: God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas. We have lost a beloved one, a job, a goal or perhaps a cause, or a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone. We are weary from our journey. We have found no room in the Inn. We come to you seeking rest, and peace and shelter from the storms of life.

P: God of love, in this Christmas season we embrace and offer to You all that used to be which is now lost to us, and cannot be again. Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us especially this night, until the Light returns and the morning comes.

P: Lord, hear our prayers. **All:** And in your merciful love, answer. Amen.

The hymn of Hope: “My Faith Looks Up to Thee” ([Congregation sings vs. 1,2 & 4](#))
[vs. 3 music plays softly as pastor reads the words for all to listen to.](#)

1 My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
take all my guilt away,
oh, let me from this day
be wholly thine!

2 May thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire;
as thou hast died for me,
oh, may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire!

3 P: While life's dark maze I tread and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide; bid darkness turn to day, wipe sorrow's
tears away, nor let me ever stray from thee aside.

4 When ends life's transient dream,
when death's cold, sullen stream
shall o'er me roll;
blest Savior, then, in love
fear and distrust remove;
oh, bear me safe above,
a ransomed soul!

P: I invite you that are participating at home to light a candle for your loved one or the loss you recall this night.

P: As you do that listen to the words of Psalm 121.

Hymn of Holy Comfort: “Silent Night, Holy Night” (vs. 1 & 3)

1 Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

3 Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love’s pure light
Radiant beams from your holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

Text: Joseph Mohr, 1792-1849; tr. John F. Young, 1820-1885

Benediction: O God, support us all day long in this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed. Let the fever of life be over and our work now done. Then Lord, in your mercy, grant safe lodging, holy rest and peace at the last.

The peace of the Lord be with you always. Amen.

