

A Service of the Longest Night



Artist ~ John Stuart

Sunday, December 22nd 2024

St. Paul's Anglican Church

A Joint Service with First Presbyterian Church

Welcome

Please respond with the text that is in bold type.

The hymns are taken from 2 blue hymnals, Common Praise (CP), which is the larger of the two, and Sing a New Creation (SNC)

The Gathering

Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thanks be to God.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night", darkness is not dark to you, O Lord; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.

Psalm 139:10-11

Tonight, we gather here in this place of refuge,
for we are lost; we are lonely; we are afraid.

Tonight, we gather, daring to wonder if God has indeed come in Jesus – discerning the rejection we have known, the loss we have endured, familiar with our failed relationships, holding our heartache in hands of tenderness.

Tonight, we gather with neighbours and strangers, a family made one by our brokenness, coming with our heads filled with doubts, and our hearts full of hope.

Tonight, we gather as we are, for God has promised to meet us here and to welcome us for who we are.

Hymn SNC#2 *Longing for Light*

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Christ be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Refrain

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Refrain

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Refrain

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Refrain

Prayer

Holy and loving God, you became weak so that we would find strength in moments of heartbreak; you chose to wander in the wilderness of the world, to be present with us even when we feel hopeless. You set aside your glory to hold our pain so we might be healed, even when it feels as if there is no hope. You became one of us, so we would never be alone in any moment, in any circumstance.

**So come now, Child of Bethlehem,
to strengthen us in these days.**

Prayer of Lament

Gentle God, all around us are the sights and sounds of Christmas, the laughter, the parties, the songs of carolers, the excitement of children, the music in every store.

**But deep within us we carry our pain, sadness, and loss;
our grief walks with us every step we take.**

In this time when every night stretches into eternity, we come to you, loving God, bringing our gifts: not gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but grief, bitterness, and loss.

Be with us in our longing, in our despair, in our loss, in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn CP#122 *In the Bleak Midwinter*

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed,
the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.

*Words of Comfort & Hope
from Holy Scripture*

First Reading Isaiah 40: 1 - 11 *Read by Tamara Chapman*

Word of God. Word of Life.
Thanks be to God.

Psalm 121

Led by Julie Case

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills;
* from where is my help to come?

**2 My help comes from the Lord,
* the maker of heaven and earth.**

3 The Lord will not let your foot be moved
* and the One who watches over you will not fall asleep.

**4 Behold, the One who keeps watch over Israel
* shall neither slumber nor sleep.**

5 The Lord, the Lord, watches over you;
* the Lord is your shade at your side,

**6 so that the sun shall not strike you by day,
* nor the moon by night.**

7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil
* and shall keep you safe.

**8 The Lord shall watch over your going out
and your coming in, * from this time forth for evermore.**

Gospel Reading

John 1: 1 - 14

Read by Christine Duncan

Word of God. Word of Life.
Thanks be to God.

Reflection
Time of Quiet

Hymn CP#100 *Comfort, Comfort Ye My People vv. 1&3*

Comfort, comfort ye my people;
speak ye peace, thus says your God.
Comfort those who sit in darkness,
bowed beneath oppression's load;
speak ye to Jerusalem
of the peace that waits for them:
tell her that her sins I cover,
and her warfare now is over.

Make ye straight what long was crooked;
make the rougher places plain.
Let your hearts be true and humble
as befits Messiah's reign.
For the glory of the Lord
now o'er earth is shed abroad,
and all flesh shall see the token,
that God's Word is never broken.

Candle Lighting & Litany of Remembrance

Lighting the first candle

Julie Case

We light this first candle to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas.

May God's eternal love surround them.

Lighting the second candle

Tamara Chapman

We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.

**Refresh, restore, renew us, O God,
and lead us into your future.**

Lighting the third candle

Jennifer Palmer

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 of difficult times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Lighting the fourth candle

Christine Duncan

This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, also promises us a place and time where pain and suffering will be no more.

**Let us remember the One who shows the way and
who goes with us into our tomorrows.**

*You are invited to come forward and light a candle or
candles, perhaps in memory of a loved one, perhaps as a
symbol of the Christ light shining in your darkness.*

Music *There is a Balm in Gilead*
Sung by Chanticleer with Yoette Flunder

Prayers of the People

Gracious God, in the season of Advent, we give thanks that you came to be among us.

Emmanuel, God with us.

You came into the darkness of that time:

a time of change and stress, uncertainty and doubt.

You did not enter this world surrounded by grand things.

You were born in a stable, to parents far from home.

O God, we pray for your presence here and now, in the difficulties of our time.

**We lay before you our pleas of honesty and need,
of worry and hope.**

We pray for all who are grieving.

**O Lord, you know what it means to lose someone
you dearly love.**

We pray for all who are lonely.

**O Lord, you know how it feels to look around
and feel that there is no one left.**

We pray for all who are anxious.

**O Lord, you know what it is like to be weary
and heavy-laden.**

We pray for all who are vulnerable.

**O Lord, you know what it means to be unhoused
and unsafe.**

We pray for all who are beset by challenges,
physical or emotional.

O Lord, you know how it feels to be in pain.

We pray for all who are longing for light, and for hope.

O Lord, you know what it is like to wait in the darkness.

Lord Jesus Christ, we give thanks that you came to be
among us,

full of grace and truth.

In you we find our welcome.

**You are our comfort and our companion along
the journey of life.**

You are invited to offer your own prayers either silently or
aloud. *(pause)*

Loving God, hear our prayers this day. Grant to all,
and especially to those in sorrow this Advent-Christmas
time, the blessing we ask in the name of Christ, who taught
us to pray together saying,

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, and the power, and the
glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Prayer for the Night

Lord, the night is almost upon us.

The night is for stillness.

Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.

What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.

The night is dark.

Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.

The night is quiet.

Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all who are dear to us, and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.

Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities.

In your name we pray. **Amen.**

The Blessing

Hymn CP#119 *Silent Night*

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.

Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia,
Christ, the Saviour, is born!
Christ, the Saviour, is born!

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Dismissal

We move forward in the light of Christ,
a light no darkness can overcome.

Thanks be to God.