



winter solstice 2021
the longest night of the year

Longest Night of the Year
December 21, 2021
7:00pm

Welcome to this service on the longest night of the year. Tonight, in the midst of a holiday season filled with much that brings us joy and delight, we pause in the busyness to also name the grief we carry, the weariness of our hearts and bodies, and our fears and anxieties. In a world filled with shadows, we seek a reprieve from the glare of Christmas lights and mall decorations, and turn instead to the soft glow of candles to remind us of the gentle presence of Emmanuel, the one who is with us in our grief, our fear, our loneliness, our pain.

We pray that you will find hope and comfort in this time of prayer, Scripture, and song, and the sure and certain knowledge that you are known and held by the God who stepped into our darkness.

Prelude

Welcome and *Greeting

All around us, lights are lit and carols play.
The season heaps joy upon us.

Yet, we who come here, we carry more than joy;
we carry loss, worry, grief and pain.

We come weary, seeking rest from expectations.
We seek a holy presence to be with us.

We come to this place, by the resilient grace of God:
love that never lets us go.

Song: "Lead, Kindly Light"

Audrey Assad

(Please listen to this song of gathering and prayer)

Lead, kindly Light, amidst the grey and gloom;
the night is long, and I'm far from home.
Here in the dark, I do not ask to see
the path ahead - one step enough for me.
Lead on, lead on, kindly Light.

I was not ever willing to be led;
I could have stayed, but I ran instead.
In spite of fear, I followed my pride.
My eyes could see, but my heart was blind.
Lead on, lead on, kindly Light.

And in the night, when I was afraid,
your feet beside my own on the way.

Each stumbling step where other men have trod
shortens the road leading home to my God.
Lead on, lead on,
my God, my God,
lead on, lead on, kindly Light.

***Opening Prayer - Psalm 23**

**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
he restore my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

***Song: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"**

LUYH 88

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.
2. For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.
3. How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.
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;
O Come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her that her hard
service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's
hand
double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be
revealed,
and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has
spoken.

"To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy

One.

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty
strength,
not one of them is missing.

Why do you complain, Jacob?
Why do you say, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord;
my cause is disregarded by my God"?
Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary,
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Sing: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" vs. 1-2

LUYH

61

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel
2. O come, O wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel

Psalm 22:1-5, 9-11, 22-24

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

**My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.**

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

**In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.**

To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

**You brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.**

From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.

**Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.**

I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.

**You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!**

For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

Sing: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" vs. 4, 6

LUYH 61

4. O come, thou branch of Jesse's stem,
unto thine own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

6. O come, O Bright and Morning
Star and bring us comfort from afar!
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Matthew 11:28-29

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

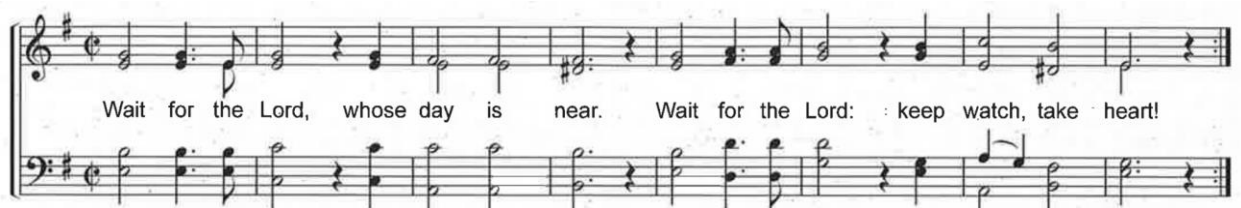
Prayer and Candle Lighting

the God, in this time of anticipation, of looking forward to Christmas Day when we celebrate Christ's birth, we often find ourselves uncomfortable, uneasy, worried and sad. The joy in music escapes us and we feel alone, feeling out of step with the rest of our society.

We know some of our sadness comes from unrealistic expectations while other circumstances are very real and out of our control. So we name our feelings knowing that you hold us as we grieve and will help us to find peace and comfort as you meet each of our needs with your love.

(Silence)

Sing: *Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.*



God of light and life, we light these candles this evening for all who are struggling this holiday season.

We light this first candle for all those who need prayers for their physical or mental health. We especially remember those struggling with cancer, depression, and thoughts of suicide. May the light of this candle remind us of the healing available to us in Jesus Christ. Hear our prayers.

(Silence)

Sing: *Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.*

We light this candle for all those who are struggling with issues of financial concerns, job loss, or debt. We remember those who must choose between feeding their children and paying their rent. We pray for the food insecure and the homeless in our midst.

(Silence)

Sing: *Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.*

We light this candle for all those who are victims of violence in any of its forms. May your light lead us to peace, safety, and truth. By your Spirit help us to reach out to you for healing, both physically and spiritually, to trust in your justice, to find assistance, to resist blaming ourselves, to be confident in the future you have planned for us, a future filled with hope.

(Silence)

Sing: *Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.*

We light this candle for all those who are sick. We pray for those living with chronic illness, for those grappling with recent diagnoses, and for those anticipating or recovering from surgeries. We pray for all of us living within this world-wide pandemic. God, we know you hold us in our fear and anxiety and we are grateful.

(Silence)

Sing: *Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.*

We light this candle for all those bearing the weight of grief. We pray for those whose tables will be short a plate this year, because of illness, Covid, travel challenges, or death. We pray especially for those who are grieving the death of a loved one, and who feel that grief acutely in the holiday season. God of comfort and abiding love, surround us with your steadfastness and hope.

(Silence)

Sing: *Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.*

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus, who taught us how to pray:

**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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.**

Song: *"Glory in the Darkest Place"*

Sovereign Grace

(please listen to this song of hope)

Out of the depths of silent night
Immanuel, come hear our cry.
Our grief is strong, our burdens great;
the night is long and hope is faint.

You came to set the captives free;
a Morning Star of joy and peace.
Why does this darkness feel so deep?
Why can't our weary spirits see?

Glory, glory, glory in the darkest place.
Glory, glory, glory let Your mercy reign.

Out of the depths of silent night
a Savior born, a mother's sigh.
The darkness trembled at this Star,
a beam of hope for troubled hearts.

You came to make Your blessings known
and bear our curse of death alone.
You came to share our suffering
so in our sorrow we could sing:

Glory, glory, glory in the darkest place.
Glory, glory, glory let Your mercy reign.

***Benediction**

Service Order taken in large part from "Evening Vespers and Blue Christmas Service", December 16, 2020, Riviera Presbyterian Church
Call to Worship: © United Church of Canada

Participants

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