



THE
LONGEST
NIGHT

THE LONGEST NIGHT WORSHIP SERVICE

Wednesday, December 21, 2022

All Are Welcome

We welcome you to worship on this, the longest night of the year. Whatever you are feeling or experiencing is welcome here. You do not need to hide your pain or grief. Here, you are greeted by the One who comes as light, healing, and love into this world of darkness. Sit back and relax. Engage in whatever parts of the service speak to you. Know that you are exactly where you need to be right now, and you are not alone. Emmanuel - God is with us.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John 1:5

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WELCOME TO ST. JOHN'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2022

GATHERING WITH GOD

Please stand as you are comfortable. **Bold indicates congregational response.*

Prelude

Welcome and Prayer

Rev. Lane Cotton Winn

Welcome, you who ache and do not know why.

Welcome, you who are weary of loneliness.

Welcome, you who battle with chronic pain in your bodies or chronic despair in your minds.

Welcome, you riddled with anxiety around every corner.

Welcome, you in transition and you starving for change.

Welcome, you who feel the weight of debt and shame.

Welcome, you at the beginning of a diagnosis.

Welcome, you at the end.

Welcome, you, friend or family of anyone carrying these loads.

Welcome, skeptic. Welcome, purpose-needer.

Welcome, you who cannot recognize yourself.

Welcome, you who have lost love, who have lost hope, who have lost faith in a good God.

Welcome, all of you...every part of you...into this space.

Let us be together, here and now.

Tonight's service, held on the longest night of the year, is designed for those who are experiencing pain, loss, isolation, and grief. On this night, we remember those for whom the holidays are not joyful—those who are mourning the loss of a loved one; those who are separated or alienated for whatever reason; those who are lonely; those who are feeling depression and sadness.

Let us be together, here and now.

Glory to You, O God, the hope of our salvation.

Who has promised to never leave or forsake us.

You humbled yourself into our existence, shrinking into the world you created to be nurtured by the womb of an unwed teenager. Your entrance was met with rejection; your resting place, a trough for animals. You lived your first years as a refugee. You were tempted, threatened, humiliated, and despairing. You, Christ Jesus, wept. You depended on other humans for borrowed colts, boats, homes, and food. After your death, you were placed in someone else's tomb. You, Jesus, have known the human experience, filled with heartache, poverty, dependency, loss and fear.

Emmanuel, God with us.

Let us pray.

God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to hold with one another our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us to know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy and love that you promise to all of your people through the gift of your son Jesus. Amen.

***Hymn**

Emmanuel, Emmanuel
The United Methodist Hymnal 204

**Emmanuel, Emmanuel,
his name is called Emmanuel.
God with us, revealed in us,
his name is called Emmanuel.**

Readings

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

Johnny McWilliams

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Wild Geese
by Mary Oliver
Read by Rev. Marie Williams

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Thanks be to God.

***Hymn**

Come, Thou-Long Expected Jesus

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.**

**Come to earth to taste our sadness, he whose glories knew no end;
by his life he brings us gladness, our Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.**

**Leaving riches without number, born within a cattle stall;
this the everlasting wonder, Christ was born the Lord of all.**

**Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.**

**By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.**

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

First Candle

Rev. Larry Norman

As we light the candle of Hope, we ask, O God, where is our hope? Where are your known plans to give us a future? Where is the hope that renews our strength when we've experienced such long stints of loss? How do we set our minds on things above when we are so tired and confused? How do we trust that the fires we walk through will not burn us when we have been burned before?

In the darkness, Lord, lead us to the light of Hope.

(The candle is lit and a silence is kept.)

Second Candle

Pastor Lane

As we light the candle of Love, we ask, O God, where is our love? Where do we find it again once we've invested it in such fragile bodies no longer here? Where do we find it again after an ending, a tragedy, a betrayal? Where is love amongst so much hate? Where is love amongst so much pain? Where is love for our neighbor when we cannot see your image within them? Where is love for ourselves when we cannot see your image within us?

In the darkness, Lord, lead us to the light of Love.

(The candle is lit and a silence is kept.)

Third Candle

Rev. Larry

As we light the candle of Joy, we ask, O God, where is our joy? How do we celebrate amongst grief? How do we exercise the muscles of laughter amidst tears? Where is our joy for this life when we are surrounded by so much death? Where is our joy in this community when we are isolated by so much loneliness? Where is our joy in this day that you have made? How can we be glad in it?

In the darkness, Lord, lead us to the light of Joy.

(The candle is lit and a silence is kept.)

Fourth Candle

Pastor Lane

As we light the candle of Peace, we ask, O God, where is our peace? Where is the peace that passes understanding? Where is the peace in which we lie down and sleep, where you make us to dwell in safety? Where is the peace in our world, in our homes, and our hearts? Where is the peace for those who have loved and lost, who have experienced trauma, who have made mistakes?

In the darkness, Lord, lead us to the light of Peace.

(The candle is lit and a silence is kept.)

Anthem

Dr. Steve Rushing

Come Now, O God, When Our Love Is Forsaken

Readings

John 1:1-5

Read by Rev. Marie Williams

Isaiah 40:1-5

Read by Dee Muenzler

Reflection

*During this time, we invite you into a time of prayer and reflection.
If you would like to light a candle and/or receive prayer and anointing,
please come forward as the music plays.*

Christ Candle

As we light the Christ candle, we ask, O God, where is Christ?

He is here among us, sharing in our life, promising us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

He is here among us, giving us today what we need for today.

He is here among us, showing us God's self in each other, in nature, in memory, in healing—however slowly.

He is here among us, with a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light.

He is here among us, resurrecting.

He is here among us, not leaving us.

He is here among us, not forsaking us.

He is here among us, still.

God is here among us, still.

Let us pray.

**God who came near, is near, and will come near again,
We thank you that all of the darkness in the universe cannot
squelch a single flame.**

Lead us to your Light, O Lord.

Comfort us on the winding road of grief.

Steady us on the disorienting road of change.

Fill us on the empty road of loss.

Connect us on the lonely road of despair.

Heal us in ways for which we don't know how to ask.

Meet us in places and people where we'd least expect you.

**We thank you for the Christmas story and the gift
that it offers us.**

Now comfort us. Encourage us. Empower us.

Amen.

ONWARD WE GO

***Hymn**

In the Bleak Midwinter

The United Methodist Hymnal 221, vs. 1, 2, & 4

**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 mid-winter, 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.**

**What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.**

***Benediction**

Go in peace,

knowing that the God, whose love created this world,
sent Jesus into the same world to be our friend,
companion,
and Savior.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has never put it out.

Amen.

***Postlude**

Thank you for worshipping with us.

Go in peace.

POINSETTIA DEDICATIONS
IN MEMORY OF

Bevelyn Yonts *by Pam and John Toney*
George and Frances Lindsley, &
James and Hilda Thomason *by Jim and Norma Thomason*
Our son, Jake Shearer, *by Fred and Becky Shearer*
My sister, Pat Grace, *by Janice Schmidt*
Mary and Jake Marino &
Tony Marino *by Bobbi and Frank Marino*
Alline and Papa Webb *by Bobbi and Frank Marino*
Karen Cochran *by Bobbi and Frank Marino*
Rev. John Williams *by Rev. Marie Williams*
Jack and Betty Byrd, Eddie Byrd,
Dorothy Worthy, & Gerald Creed *by Mike and Jackie Creed*
Christopher Schroder *by Betty Schroeder*
Our parents, John and Mae Fowler &
James and Frances Ruth Roby *by Jim and Claudia Fowler*
Our parents *by Don and Carol Gordon*
Tommy Dunbar *by Susan Dunbar*
Keith Hartman *by Ben and Julian Hartman & Rev. Lane Cotton Winn*
Dan Winn *by the Winn Family*
Nancy R. Brown *by Jessica Brown*

POINSETTIA DEDICATIONS
IN HONOR OF

My mother, Janice Silver *by Karen Silver Holton*
My son, Luke, *by Betty Schroeder*
Jim and Claudia Fowler *by the Brooks family*
Revelation Sunday School Class *by Bill and Joyce Perry*
Our four great grandchildren: Weston, Hensley, Emmylou,
and Wrenley *by Phil and Jill Slicker*
My children and grandchildren *by Rev. Marie Williams*
Pastor Lane and Bill Perry *by Lynn Cooper*
God's gift of our sons, Billy and Hans *by Bill and Jane Metcalf*
Our family *by Don and Carol Gordon*
Jane and Livia Walker *by Mari and Shawn Walker*



CHRISTMAS EVE

WORSHIP AT ST. JOHN'S UMC
SATURDAY DECEMBER 24
5 PM

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

We hope you will join us for a beautiful service on Christmas Eve at 5:00 p.m. as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child. Our service will include singing of Christmas carols, reading the Christmas story from the Gospel, an inspiring message, a special time for children, and Holy Communion. Our service will conclude by candlelight. Children, guests, family and friends are all invited!



CHRISTMAS

WORSHIP AT ST. JOHN'S UMC
SUNDAY DECEMBER 25
10 AM - ONE SERVICE

CAROLS, COMMUNION, AND COOKIES!

We invite you to come comfortable to our one worship service. We will sing tons of Christmas carols, share in Holy Communion, and following the service enjoy loads of cookies plus coffee and hot cocoa. Children are invited to bring one toy they received for Christmas for a Blessing of the Toys during worship - in person and virtually.



ST. JOHN'S
United Methodist Church

Glorifying God. Feeding People. Making Disciples.