

Welcome to
St. Luke Cedar Hill

A Longest Night Service
December 20, 2020



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Greeting and Preparation of Space

Opening

We welcome you to this Longest Night service. This is a time to take a step away from the hype of all the decorations, the music playing in stores, the advertisements that tell us we can buy that feeling of “wonder”, and that all your troubles can be miles away as you have yourself a merry little Christmas.

For those of us who are feeling sadness or pain at this time of year, it is also easy to feel edged out and alone as we see others get caught up in the busyness of their own Christmas preparations with joy. In this time that we have together, we will reflect on words from Scripture, and the Christmas story, that we hope will open the way to feelings of comfort, hope and peace. Please feel to participate in the service as you are comfortable. There will be some familiar carols that you are free to sing along with, or listen to. There will be opportunities for you to pray out loud, or to make the prayers your own by saying “Amen.” If you wish to participate by following along and remaining silent, that is just fine, too!

Prayer

Let us commit this time to God, as we begin with prayer. Caring and tender-hearted God, we come into your presence tonight as we bring with us our pain, loneliness, sadness, confusion, and disorientation. We ask that you will meet us where it hurts, and assure us that we are not alone as we struggle to find solace and peace. We ask for strength for the journey we are on, and for courage to face the tomorrows ahead. May we know your healing touch in the time we share together. This we ask in the name of Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace. **Amen.**

Carol: In the Bleak Midwinter (CP 122) v. 1-2

First Reading

A reading from John, verses 1 to 5.

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was close beside God, and the Word was God. In the beginning, the Word was close beside God. All things came into existence through him; not one thing that exists came into existence without him. Life was in him and this life was the light of the human race. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Word of God, Word of Life.

Thanks be to God.

Litany of Remembrance

(The first outer candle of the Advent wreath is lit.)

We light this first candle to remember those we love who have died. We embrace them in our hearts, and give thanks for the memories that keep them close to us in this season of expectation, when all creation waits for the Light.

We remember them with love, and give thanks that God's eternal love surrounds them.

Carol: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (CP 89) v. 1

(The second outer candle of the Advent wreath is lit.)

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of friendships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, loss of joy. We acknowledge the pain of the past, and offer it now to you, caring God, asking that into our hurting hearts and open hands you will place your gift of peace.

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

Carol: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (CP 89) v. 2

(The third outer candle of the Advent wreath is lit.)

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember this past year, the stress of living with COVID-19, the fear and the restrictions; of being separated from our families, friends and loved ones. We accept and place before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for what we have had to go through. We accept and place before you the times we have walked alone in darkness.

We remember that though we have journeyed far, during those times we may have turned away from the light did not mean that the light itself failed. We remember that though the darkness of winter is upon us, and the nights are long, with the turning of the earth the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

Carol: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (CP 89) v. 6

(The fourth outer candle of the Advent wreath is lit.)

We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Christmas, which began in abandonment, insecurity and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that our loving God who kept the light shining in the temple, and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

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

Carol: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (CP 89) v. 7

Second Reading

A reading from Luke, chapter 2, verses 1-7.

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went

from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

Word of God, Word of Life.

Thanks be to God.

Carol: What Child is This (CP 137) v. 1, 2

Third Reading: Luke 2: 8-20

A reading from Luke, chapter 2, verses 8-20.

There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Saviour has just been born in David's town, a Saviour who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about the child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose,

glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Word of God, Word of Life.

Thanks be to God.

Carol: Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming (CP 117) v. 1, 2

Reflection

Carol: Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (CP 125) v. 1, 2

Prayers

God of mercy and compassion, some of us are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas, and while we remember that once it was a special day for us, something or someone precious has been taken from us in this life. We are weary from the journey, and we find no room at the hostel. We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter. God, hear our prayer.

God, may hope come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness this night, and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

God of grace, in the spirit of the season, we ask for what we need to comfort us as we go through these days ahead. We ask you to sustain us who are wandering, or weeping, or carrying heavy burdens. Grant that we may be lifted up so we may carry on in your peace. God, hear our prayer.

God, may hope come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness this night, and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

God of love, in this Christmas time we offer to you all that used to be which cannot be again. Please hold us close in your

embrace, and be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes. God, hear our prayer.

Gentle God, may hope come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness this night, and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

God of all, we pray for our families and loved ones who are missing us, and who we long to see. Help us to see the connection of love that keeps our hearts close together, and be with them, granting them peace, hope and courage as they journey through this Christmas season. God, hear our prayer.

Gentle God, may hope come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness this night, and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

God who loves each one of us, as we now pick up our own candle, let us reflect on this season of the longest night. As we light it, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts, spoken, or with words only you can hear...*(individual candles are lit, and a time of silence follows)*

Gentle God, may hope come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness this night, and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O God; give us light in this night season; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.

Carol: Silent Night (CP 119) v. 1 - 3

Concluding Prayer

Let us pray.

Another day will come, O God.

I do not know what it may bring forth

But make me ready 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 to do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words,
And give me the Spirit of your peace.
Amen.**

Blessing

May God bless you and keep you;
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
May the light of God's countenance be upon you,
And give you peace, now and forever more. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace this night
Thanks be to God.

Postlude: O Little Town of Bethlehem

***Some of the resources used in tonight's Longest Night Service are based on an order developed and used at the Cathedral Church of St. Andrew, Honolulu, Hawaii. Adaptations were made by The Rev. Joan Scandrett.*

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