



# *The Longest Night*

A Reflective Service of Healing and Hope

December 20, 2023

7:00 pm

## Order of Worship

St. John's United Church of Christ

500 W. Main Street, Lansdale, PA 19446

7:00 pm—December 20, 2023—The Longest Night

*You are invited to stand when indicated by an asterisk and speak the words in bold if able.*

### \*COMING TOGETHER

Tonight, as Christmas draws near, we dare to allow ourselves to wonder if God, Emmanuel, is indeed “with us”. Does God look beyond the holiday cheer and hear our prayers, see our suffering, and meet us in our grief?

**We think of all the loss we have endured this year, the failed and strained relationships, the scars we bear, all the heartache we hold.**

Tonight, we gather with different stories, different hurts, and different longings~ yet we are made one by the brokenness of our humanity and our need for Christ's light.

**We come praying that that light will not be overcome by our many doubts.**

Tonight, we gather, just as we are, and God welcomes us.

**God has promised to meet us here. Let us set down all the heavy burdens we carry and lean into the loving embrace of God.**

### \*TAIZÉ CHANT: Bless the Lord, My Soul

*The chant is sung four times. The choir sings the chant first, with the congregation joining after.*



### SCRIPTURE

Psalm 22:1-5, 9-11a

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me...Do not be far from me.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE AND LIGHT

THE FIRST CANDLE IS LIT

We light this first candle of love to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their presence.

We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us  
in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light.

**We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.**

*(sung to ST. LOUIS, the tune of O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

**O little town of Bethlehem,  
So still in our minds' eye  
With candle lights and starlit nights,  
And angels drawing nigh.  
Yet in thy dark streets soundeth  
The echoed wails of grief,  
Of ancient fears, of bombs and tears,  
Of agony and strife.**

*A period of silent reflection.*

THE SECOND CANDLE IS LIT

We light this second candle of hope, to honor the times we have felt hopeless and without a way forward. We hold in our consciousness the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We cling to the light of hope that shines upon us and pray that it illuminates a way out of the hole that grief often leaves us in.

**We remember that through You all things are possible.**

**Refresh, restore, renew us and our world, O God, and lead us into Your future.**

*(sung to ST. LOUIS, the tune of O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

**For Christ was born of Mary  
And Joseph, born in love;  
But soldiers came, in someone's name,  
With something left to prove.  
So Mary brought up Jesus  
In lands broken and cursed,  
To preach and sing of no more kings,  
Of peace to all the Earth.**

*A period of silent reflection.*

### THE THIRD CANDLE IS LIT

We light this third candle of joy and recall the many days and nights we have carried deep sadness, anxiety, and worry. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, joyless and in darkness.

**We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, the joy of dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.**

*(sung to ST. LOUIS, the tune of O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

**How desperately, how desperately  
That peace is needed now,  
Which Love imparts to human hearts  
To flower and to grow.  
Our ears are numbed by anguish,  
Cries from this world of sin.  
Our weak souls yearn to feel the burn  
Of Sacred Power within.**

*A period of silent reflection*

### THE FOURTH CANDLE IS LIT

We light this fourth candle of peace and acknowledge that the story of Jesus is one that began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time and land of war and strife. We think of the unrest and dis-ease in our own time, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our broken world, our wounded hearts, and outstretched hands, You will place the gift of peace.

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

*(sung to ST. LOUIS, the tune of O Little Town of Bethlehem)*

**O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Reveal to us thy Way  
Of justice, peace, and healing Grace;  
Be born in us today.  
We are the Christmas angels;  
Help us glad tidings tell.  
O walk with us, shine forth through us:  
Each one, Emmanuel!**

*A period of silent reflection*

## CANDLE LIGHTING

*You are invited to come forward to light a candle in memory of someone, something, or simply as a sign of hope and a prayer for light that overcomes darkness.*

## MUSIC DURING CANDLE LIGHTING

The Music of Stillness

Elaine Hagenberg

*There will be rest, and sure stars shining  
over rooftops crowned with snow,  
a reign of rest, serene forgetting,  
the music of stillness, holy and low.*

*I will make this world of my devising,  
out of a dream in my lonely mind.  
I shall find the crystal of peace above me,  
Stars I shall find.*

-Sara Teasdale

## \*PRAYER

**Holy God of Advent, hear our prayers of longing, of lament, of grief. See our flickers of love, hope, peace, and joy, small as they may be. Just as these candles create warmth and light, may we, too, feel and cling to the warmth and light of your love. Come now, Child of Bethlehem, to strengthen us in these days. May we feel your presence in a way we have never known, not just as one born in a stable long ago and far away, but as one born in our hearts, in our hopes, in our spirits, even in our weakness. Amen.**

## \*TAIZÉ CHANT: Wait for the Lord

*The chant is sung four times. The choir sings the chant first, with the congregation joining after.*

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

The first line of the Taizé Chant is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in the key of D major (one sharp). The melody is simple, using mostly half notes and whole notes. The lyrics are: "Wait for the Lord, whose day is near."

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

The second line of the Taizé Chant continues the melody on a grand staff in D major. The lyrics are: "Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!" The line ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

**\*BENEDICTION**

From "The Mood of Christmas..."

*I will light Candles this Christmas,  
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all year long.*

*-Howard Thurman*

***You are welcome to remain in the sanctuary to pray or sit peacefully as long as you wish.  
When you are ready, please depart in silence.***

***\*Though offering will not be brought forward during our service this evening, your gifts  
help us to continue to be a beacon of light and a place of healing and hope in our  
community. You will find offering plates and a QR code for virtual giving located at  
each exit. Thank you!***

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**Worship Leaders**

Rev. Dale Davis & Rev. Addie Stong  
Andrew Paulson, Minister of Music  
Chancel Choir

**Copyright Information**

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*Bless the Lord, My Soul*

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*Wait for the Lord*

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## **St. John's United Church of Christ**

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If you would like more information about St. John's please speak with one of the staff

or visit our website at <http://www.st-johns-ucc.org>

Rev. Dale Davis, M. Div., Interim Senior Pastor      Rev. Adelaide L. Stong, M. Div., Associate Pastor  
Andrew Paulson, M.M., M.A., Minister of Music      Abbie Lampe, Minister of Music for Children & Youth  
Lisa Delp, Church Admin.      Leroy Horst, Buildings & Grounds Supervisor      Bill Bergey, Custodian  
Liz Rivett, Council President

## **ADVENT & CHRISTMAS 2023 AT ST. JOHN'S ~ GOD INCARNATE TAKING PLACE**

The birth of Christ is a reminder that God comes to us in subtle, intimate, and surprising ways.

Join us as we follow the story of *God Incarnate Taking Place*.



### **Sunday, December 24: Christmas Eve**

*10:15am – Sunday Morning Worship with Holy Communion*

Music from the Children's Choir, Piano, and Organ.

Join us as we sing familiar carols and hear the Christmas story read from the Gospel according to Luke.

A special Christmas Eve prelude begins at 10am.

*10:15pm – Sunday Evening Worship with Holy Communion*

Music from the Chancel Choir, United Ringers (Handbell Choir), String Quartet, Piano, and Organ.

Join us as we sing familiar carols, hear the Christmas story read from the Gospel according to Luke, and light candles to welcome the birth of Christ. A special Christmas Eve prelude begins at 10pm.

### **Wednesday, December 27**

*No Wednesday Evening Programming*

### **Sunday, December 31: New Year's Eve**

*10:15am – Sunday Morning Worship*

Join us as we end 2023 and welcome 2024 with a special New Year's Eve worship service.