

December 21, 2022

THE LONGEST NIGHT



**GATHERING MUSIC** Lauren Dow Wegner and Kevin McClure

*Lost in the Night*

**WELCOME**

**Opening Reflection** Cheryl Lawrie

It takes faith beyond imagining  
to have come to hear this story  
if you are living things too difficult  
to be made sense of  
by an ancient memory of angels and wise men.

It takes faith beyond imagining  
to have come to hear this story  
when you feel that it will be a greater miracle  
than any virgin birth  
for love to be born right now in our world.

The alleluias we sing tonight  
will not be to drown out the world's truths that would deny  
them;  
but to pray they will hold us in their faith.

So we gather  
the bewildered, the broken hearted, the fragile and the hopeful  
the faithful and the faithless  
because all we have left when we stand in the world's darkness  
is this longing for love to be born once again.

## **Silent Prayer**

(chime 3x)

**Song** Solo: Pr. Lauren Dow Wegner

**#245** vs 1, 2, 5 ***Creator of the Stars of Night***

## **Greeting**

(adapted from Lenora & Gary Rand | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org)

Pastor: Tonight is a night for us to be together in the dark. But, so often, darkness scares us. Darkness is our nightmare. We've been taught to fear it, to avoid it, to keep the lights on, to think happy thoughts, to pretend everything's all right, and to not go into "that dark place."

Yet we are here tonight in the dark because God created light and dark, day and night, and said both were good. To fear darkness is to miss what we can see there and we can't see clearly anywhere else. So, here we are.  
We are in the dark.

We are here to acknowledge that we are in the dark about so many things: We have so many unanswered questions. We have so much fear and sorrow we can't make sense of--tucked away in secret places. And for some of us, we have fresh grief that's raw and feels unending.

We can hear in this night an invitation to not run so quickly to the bright shiny objects, to easy answers, and

loud, well-lit rooms. This sacred darkening makes room for all of who we are--for our laments and longing, our confessions and our cries. This darkness can help us see what we cannot see in the light. This dark and holy night can perhaps even be a night where dreams are dreamed, hope can be born.

**All:           And God is with us. We are not alone.**

**Song #528 3X   *Come Fill Our Hearts***

**Reflection for Advent Candle Lighting** by Bonnie Kinscher

Pastor:       We light this first candle in memory of those people we have lost through death.  
                  We remember them by name in our hearts or out loud.  
                  We remember those whose lives were taken far too soon.  
                  We give thanks for these people.  
                  We treasure their memories.

(Silence)

                  We light this second candle to ask for deliverance from the pain of loss.  
                  We bring to mind all of the losses we have experienced  
this            year,  
                  And all of the losses in past years that return to our minds  
                  this time of year and bring sadness:  
                  The loss of relationships, the loss of health, the loss of  
jobs,          the loss of financial security.  
                  We ask that God bring us comfort and hope.

(Silence)

                  We light this third candle for each of us.  
                  We offer up to God our pasts,

The times of regret and sorrow, the times of mourning, the difficult memories, the times of grief and sadness, and of loneliness and pain.

We ask that God take away the shadows.

(Silence)

We light this fourth candle as a symbol of hope and promise.

We invite and celebrate the coming of the One who promises us no more suffering. . .

The One who promises us light.

The prophet Isaiah wrote:

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16)

May it be so, Lord. May it be so.

(Invite to come forward and light candles for themselves and loved ones as we sing)

### **Song #528 3X *Come Fill Our Hearts***

#### **Prayer**

Pastor: Will you come into our world, God?

Will you come with hope?

For we have too many good intentions, not enough hopes realized;

Too many questions, too little assurance;

Too many longings, too few prayers.

**All: O come, O come, Emmanuel. Bring hope.**

Pastor: Will you come into our world, God?  
Will you come with peace?  
For we have too much brokenness, not enough wholeness;  
Too much frantic activity, not enough calm;  
Too many worries, not enough dreams.

**All: O come, O come, Emmanuel. Bring peace.**

Pastor: Will you come into our world, God?  
Will you come with joy?  
For we have too much seriousness, not enough laughter;  
Too many expectations, not enough celebration.  
Too many judgments, too little rejoicing.

**All: O come, O come, Emmanuel. Bring joy.**

Pastor: Will you come into our world, God?  
Will you come with love?  
For we have too much loneliness, not enough friendship;  
Too many rules, not enough gospel;  
Too much getting, not enough caring.

**All: O come, O come, Emmanuel. Bring love.**

Pastor: Come, bringer of hope.

**All: Come, Prince of Peace.**

Pastor: Come, giver of joy.

**All: Come, lover of all people.**

Pastor: Come, O come, Emmanuel.

Come to our world, come to our hearts, come with your  
presence here tonight.

**All: Amen.**

**Song #257 vs 1 & 6 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**

### **READING...Isaiah 40:1-5**

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.  
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

### **READING...Matthew 11:28-30**

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

### **HYMN #612** vs 1 & 4 *Healer of Every Ill*

### **READING...Luke 2:18-20**

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a

sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,  
‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

### **HYMN #279** vs 1 & 4 ***O Little Town of Bethlehem***

#### **PRAYERS**

Pastor: God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with pain growing inside of us. As the nights have been growing longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around our hearts.  
In this season of our longest nights, we offer to you the pain in our hearts, the traumas that some of us cannot put into words. Loving God, hear our prayer,

**All: And in your merciful love, answer.**

Pastor: Compassionate God, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. A death or loss has changed our experience of Christmas. We find ourselves adrift, alone, lost. Lord help us find our way.  
Loving God, hear our prayer,

**All: And in your merciful love, answer.**

Pastor: The Christmas season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what was, the fears of what may be, stifle us. Please be near us this night. Loving God, hear our prayer,

**All: And in your merciful love, answer.**

Pastor: We lift up to the silent yearnings of our hearts now.

(silence)

Pastor: Loving God, hear our prayer, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ--Emmanuel.

**All: Amen.**

### **CLOSING BLESSING**

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All throughout these months  
as the shadows have lengthened,  
this blessing has been gathering itself,  
making ready, preparing for this night.

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It has practiced walking in the dark,  
traveling with its eyes closed,  
feeling its way by memory, by touch,  
by the pull of the moon even as it wanes.

--

So believe me when I tell you  
this blessing will reach you  
even if you have not light enough to  
it will find you even though  
you cannot see it coming.

--

You will know the moment  
of its arriving  
by your release of the breath  
you have held so long;



--

a loosening of the clenching in your hands,  
of the clutch around your heart;  
a thinning of the darkness  
that had drawn itself around you.

--

This blessing does not mean  
to take the night away  
but it knows its hidden roads,  
knows the resting spots along the path,  
knows what it means to travel  
in the company of a friend.

--

So when this blessing comes,  
take its hand.  
Get up. Set out on the road  
you cannot see.

--

This is the night when you can trust  
that any direction you go,  
you will be walking toward the dawn.

## **HYMN OF PEACE #281 v 1 *Silent Night, Holy Night!***

(chime 3x)

### **BLESSING**

Pastor: We depart in peace, in the name of the Father, and of the  
Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

## **WORSHIP TEAM**

<b>Pastors</b>	Pr. Tom Grevlos, Pr. Lauren Dow Wegner
<b>Director of Music and Arts</b>	Kevin McClure
<b>Assisting Minister</b>	Herb Palmer
<b>Hosts</b>	Alana and Charlie Oehler Rebecca Guengerich
<b>Creative Media</b>	Dabney Gomes
<b>Director of Digital Media Arts</b>	Dave Wegner
<b>Admin Ministry Coordinator</b>	Amanda Forsberg

***HAVE A BLESSED WEEK.***

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