

**“Longest & Darkest Night”**  
A Service of Remembrance and Healing

–WE GATHER–

**Instrumental music as a prelude to our worship together**

**Call to Worship, Confession & Assurance of Grace**

Officiant: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be.

What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world.

**People: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

Officiant: Let us acknowledge before God the heaviness of our hearts and our joy that is compromised even as the world around us celebrates.

**All: We confess the way we feel now. Our hearts feel heavy within us; we are weighed down with the loss of loved ones, the loss of opportunities, the shifting of hopes and dreams. As many people eagerly wait for Jesus’ birth, it’s hard for us to lift up our hearts. As many plan to celebrate and sing with joy, we often find the days seem gray and our tongues cannot rejoice. Help us. Embrace us. Heal us. You, who know the grief of the world, meet each of us in our aching hearts. Please hold us close until the days dawn a bit brighter and we find we can walk in delight once more.**

Officiant: God knows the emptiness we sometimes feel. God knows the feelings of abandonment, anger, loneliness, and relief we sometimes feel, too. God knows us from the depths of our hearts, and God sits with each one of us as we learn to be whole people once more. Be assured of God’s love and compassion.

**All: Amen.**

**HYMN:** “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

Officiant: Let us pray.

**All: God of light and life, in the midst of a busy season when so many around us are making plans for the birthday of Jesus, we come listening for your voice and hoping for your comforting grace. Draw near us as we draw near to you. We pray in Jesus’ name: Amen.**

**Solo:**

**WE HEAR WORDS OF HEARTBREAK FROM SCRIPTURE**

We are not the first to feel heartbreak, grief, sorrow and sadness; others before us in generations past have known those same feelings and emotions and wondered where to turn for comfort and hope. We now hear from God’s Word from some who shared our struggles.

## Hymn: "O Come, O come, Emmanuel"

**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 you, O Israel.**

The Psalmist writes: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find not rest...I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast..." (*Psalm 22:1-2,14*)

Jeremiah writes: "My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick...For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored? O, that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!" (*Jeremiah 8:18,21-9:1*)

Mary expresses her grief and Jesus grieves too: "When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept." (*John 11:32-35*)

*Silence for personal reflection*

### **Litany of Remembrance**

Officiant: We light this candle to remember those who are captive to darkness.

*(The first candle is lit.)*

For those lost in the night of addiction, depression, anxiety, or unexpected grief, we pray to God, who guided the Israelites through the darkness with a pillar of fire:

**All: Disperse the gloomy clouds of night.**

Officiant: We light this candle to remember those who have died, and those who mourn the dead.

*(The second candle is lit.)*

The shadow of death can seem impenetrably dark during these long nights. We pray to God, whose first act in creation was to call light from darkness:

**All: Death's dark shadow put to flight.**

Officiant: We light this candle to remember those who are alone.

*(The third candle is lit.)*

We remember those who isolated from loved ones; far from home; wandering down the wrong path; or convinced that God is unconcerned with their suffering. We pray to God, who is like the

woman who lit a lantern to search all night for one lost coin:

**All: Refresh the hearts that long for you.**

Officiant: We light this candle to remember those who are battling illness.

*(The fourth candle is lit.)*

We lift up those who suffer the pain, indignity, and bewilderment that accompany a broken body. For all who desire to be returned to wholeness, we pray to God, who lit the night sky with a star to guide three magi to the healing Christ:

**All: Restore the broken: make us new.**

Officiant: We light this candle to remember those who feel that hardship will overwhelm them.

*(The fifth candle is lit.)*

For the poor, the persecuted, the hungry, and the homeless, we pray to God, who remained engaged with Job as he questioned and sought meaning and purpose:

**All: In strength and beauty come and stay.**

Officiant: We light this candle to remember those affected by war.

*(The sixth candle is lit.)*

For soldiers; for civilians in war-torn nations; for families who mourn the loss of loved ones to violent conflict. We pray to God, who promises a vision of peace:

**All: Teach us your will and guide our way.**

## WE HEAR WORDS OF HOPE FROM SCRIPTURE

Hymn: “O come, O come, Emmanuel”

**O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!**

**Dispel the shadows of the night  
and turn our darkness into light.**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel.**

When God’s people have struggled throughout time, God assured them always that He was present with them to comfort and strengthen them in their need. God spoke to His people in ages past, and through them God speaks hope to us tonight too.

Isaiah wrote: “In the days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (*Isaiah 2:2-4*)

John wrote: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (*John 1:5*)

And John wrote again in Revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’” (*Revelation 21:1-5*)

*Silence for personal reflection*

### **Lighting of candles and anointing**

Whatever you carry in your heart this night; whatever is causing you to feel stress; whatever burdens you; whomever you may be remembering this night; we invite you to light a candle, an expression of your hope for light in the darkness. And if you desire, the sacrament of anointing is available as we pray for God’s love and mercy on this darkest night and in the days of this Christmas season to come.

### **Instrumental music during the candle lighting**

*Silence for personal reflection*

**Solo:**

**WE ARE SENT**

### **LORICA OF ST. PATRICK**

Officiant: I arise today

**All: Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity**

**Through belief in the threeness**

**Through confession of the Oneness**

**Towards the creator.**

Officiant: I arise today

**All: Through God’s strength to pilot me:**

**God’s might to uphold me,**

**God’s wisdom to guide me**

**God’s eye to look before me,**

**God’s ear to hear me,**

**God’s word to speak for me,**

**God’s hand to guard me,**

**God’s way to lie before me,**

**God’s host to secure me.**

Officiant: I arise today

**All: Through the strength of Christ with his baptism,  
Through the strength of his crucifixion with his burial,  
Through the strength of his resurrection with his ascension  
Through the strength of his descent for the Judgment of doom.**

Officiant: Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,

**All: Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,**

Officiant: Christ on my right, Christ on my left

**All: Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise**

Officiant: Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,

**All: Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,**

Officiant: Christ in every eye that sees me,

**All: Christ in every ear that hears me.**

Officiant: Salvation is of the Lord

**All: Salvation is of the Lord**

Officiant: Salvation is of Christ

**All: May thy salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.**

### **Blessing**

Officiant: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace.

**SENDING HYMN:** "Silent Night"

### **DISMISSAL:**

L: Go forth in the name of the promised Christ.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

*Remain in the quiet for as long as you wish. If you would like to talk with someone, there are clergy available at the front of the church.*