



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF LAKE FOREST

# *Longest Night*



Wednesday, December 22  
7:00 PM

*Adapted from liturgy written by Rev. Sarah Speed, sanctifiedart.org*

## GATHERING

### Prelude

Medley of A Stable Lamp is Burning and Veni Emmanuel

Flugelhorn, Koen Brown  
Farlee/Burkhardt, 2003

### Welcome

### Opening Poem

We are raw nerves, exposed and tender.  
We are weary bones, hunched and fragile.  
We are silent prayers, lips saying your name.  
We are wedding rings we can't take off, even though time has passed.  
We are the same pew, but it feels different now.  
We are a brave face when we have to be strong.  
We are tears in the shower when grief roars its head.  
We are setting the table, but there are empty seats.  
We are stuck in the swell, caught in the storm.  
We are moving on, caught in our guilt.  
We are okay some days, but some days we're not.  
We are familiar with the night, we know it by name.  
We are night-walkers, dream-makers, star-chasers.  
We are close to home, but home has changed.  
We are close to the surface, but the waters are rising.  
We are all of this, plus everything else, and we are here.  
We are here.  
Grief is here.  
God is here.  
The night is here.  
And all of this is true,  
and we are not alone.  
Take my hand.  
Take these words.  
Let them be your life raft.  
Let this be the longest night,  
and let it be  
whatever you need it to be.  
We are here.  
Grief is here.  
God is here.  
Take what you need.  
Amen.

### Opening Hymn

 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming, No. 129

*Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung,  
of Jesse's lineage coming, by faithful prophets sung.  
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night.*

*Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the rose I have in mind;  
with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.  
To show God's love aright she bore for us a Savior, when half spent was the night.*

*This flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,  
dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere.  
Enfleshed, yet very God, from sin and death he saves us and lightens every load.*

## READING THE WORD

### Prayer for Illumination

God, we do not have night vision. The sun has set on the world as we know it and we do not have night vision. So today we come to your Word hoping that this ancient truth found in scripture will feel like a hand in the dark. Guide our feet. Move us through this wilderness season. Tilt our heads upward to see the stars, and let your Word be a blanket in the cold, a light on the horizon, and a friend to walk alongside. We do not have night vision, but we know we have you. Move through us. Move among us and move through us. Gratefully we pray, Amen.

### Scripture Reading

### Lamentations 3:21–24

*This passage is a prayer of honesty, both acknowledging individual pain while also declaring the choice to hope through tear-filled eyes.*

But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:  
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,  
'therefore I will hope in him.'

**Music** Wait for the Lord, No. 90

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.  
Wait for the Lord; be strong; take heart!*

### Scripture Reading

**John 14:27–28**

*This passage is a moving reminder from Jesus that there are different seasons of life and faith, but that God is always returning to us.*

But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:  
“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.”

**Music** Wait for the Lord, No. 90

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.  
Wait for the Lord; be strong; take heart!*

### Scripture Reading

**Psalm 121**

*This is a psalm of comfort and hope, reminding us that our help comes from God, and that we never journey alone.*

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
He who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.

**Music** Wait for the Lord, No. 90

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.  
Wait for the Lord; be strong; take heart!*

### RESPONDING

#### Prayer of the People

God who always welcomes us home—tonight is a long night. We gather together heavy with prayer concerns. They tumble out of our mouths, they saturate every word we sing, they lay over us like a quilt, weighing on our spirits. We are a million combinations of weary and sad, lonely and grieving, angry and hurt. It is obvious that we need you, so together we sing. . .

#### *Sung Response:*

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely here  
until the Son of God appear.  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

God, we need you in the messy middles, in the unclear paths forward, the transition seasons, and the splintering of what once was. God, we need you in the grieving places, in the dining rooms with empty chairs, in the empty wombs, and in the dark of the tomb. God, we need you in our failed dreams, in shame that rises quickly, in the unknown next steps, in the discernment that is always easier said than done. And so we sing. . .

#### *Sung Response:*

*O come, thou Key of David, come,  
and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, Emmanuel. Flood our grieving hearts. Pour out your Spirit on this world. Where there is suffering, loneliness, poverty, abuse, addiction, depression, violence,—be there. Be all there. Wrap your arms around those hurting places, and carry us to your promised day. Until then, we will continue to sing. . .

*Sung Response:*

*O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
our spirits by thine advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

**Individual Prayer**

**Candle Lighting**

Solo, In the Bleak Midwinter

arr. Mack Wilburg

**Music**      O Little Town of Bethlehem, No. 121

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary and, gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the king, and peace to all on earth.*

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us; abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*

**SENDING**

**We See One Another**

Leader: We are here.

People: We are here.

Leader: I see you and your pain.

People: I see you and your pain.

Leader: I see you and your hope.

People: I see you and your hope.

Leader: You are my neighbor.

People: You are my neighbor.

Leader: We belong to one another.

People: We belong to one another.

Leader: We are not in this alone.

People: We are not in this alone.

Leader: Thanks be to God for the love that binds us.

People: Thanks be to God for the love that binds us. Amen.

**Benediction**

*After the service, we invite you to continue your reflection on the Opening Poem by reading it a few times through, out loud. Circle or underline the phrases and words that resonate with you.*