

THE LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE (A Service of Comfort and Hope)

*A time to acknowledge and remember the concerns and losses in our lives;
and to find hope in the coming of Jesus Christ, the light of the world*

GREETING AND WELCOME

PRELUDE

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 11:28-29

[Jesus said] “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Voice 1: In the midst of a world where grief and pain abound . . .

Voice 2: come worship a God who took on flesh and joins us in our hurt.

Voice 1: In the midst of a world where people hunger and thirst . . .

Voice 2: come worship a God who feeds the hungry.

Voice 1: In the midst of a world where people are abused and oppressed . . .

Voice 2: come worship a God who calls for compassion and justice.

Voice 1: In the midst of a world filled with wars and rumor of war . . .

Voice 2: come worship a God who desires nothing less than peace for the world.

Voice 1: In the midst of a world of spiritual emptiness . . .

Voice 2: come worship a God who gives life meaning.

Voice 1: Come worship a God whose grace and love know no end.

HYMN

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

UMH #211

OPENING PRAYER

Voice 1: You guide our way, O God, when the darkness surrounds us.

Voice 2: You give us your Word of hope in our fear and aloneness.

Voice 1: You guide our way, O God, when life feels dull and joyless.

Voice 2: You give us family and friends with whom to share our feelings of loss.

Voice 1: You guide our way, O God, when we long for someone no longer with us.

Voice 2: You give us memories which will be ours to relive forever.

Voice 1: You guide our way, O God, when we feel our confidence slipping.

Voice 2: You give us fresh awareness of our talents and our ability to use them

for good.

Voice 1: You guide our way, O God, when we think of the losses of others.

Voice 2: You give us the courage to stand beside the suffering and listen to their story.

Voice 1: You guide our way, O God, when your Spirit seems gone from us.

Both voices: You give us the blessing of Jesus crucified and risen, and the pledge of your presence in time and beyond time. Amen. (Silence is Kept)

SPECIAL MUSIC

Jeong Hee Lee Russell

SCRIPTURE READING

John 8:12

“Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”

CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY of REMEMBRANCE

Voice 1: We light this Advent candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas.

Voice 2: May God’s eternal love surround them.

Hymn

“Silent Night”

UMH #239

Silent night, Holy night
all is calm, all is bright
’round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Voice 2: We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to You, O God, asking that into our open hands You will place the gift of peace.

Voice 1: Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

Hymn: "Silent Night"

Silent night, holy night
 griefs abound, ever in sight,
 Christ now comes in manger bare,
 Holds our loved ones in his holy care.
 Joy, at last, to be ours.
 Joy, at last, to be ours.

Voice 1: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months and for some of us, years of difficult times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

Voice 2: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Hymn "Silent Night"

Silent night, holy night,
 shepherds quake at the sight,
 glories stream from heaven afar,
 heavenly hosts sing alleluia,
 Christ, the Savior, is born!
 Christ, the Savior, is born!

Voice 2: This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

Voice 1: Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.

Hymn: "Silent Night"

Silent night, holy night,
 Son of God, love's pure light
 radiant beams from thy holy face,
 with the dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
 Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Voice 1: We light the Christ candle, remembering Jesus Christ is always in the center of our lives. He hears our cries, he knows our hearts and, in the midst of all our thoughts and emotions, he offers us hope and healing. (Silence is Kept)

PRAYER OF COMFORT AND HOPE

Comforting God, wrap us in your presence in this time of remembrance. With these candles, help us find your light, a light that will guide us day by day, step by step, as we try to live life fully and wholly. We cherish the special ways in which we have been touched by our loved ones. We thank you for the gift their lives have been to us. We pray for the heartaches and grief of our world – the world you loved so much that you gave your son. Please comfort us, encourage us, empower us we pray. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC:

“What Child Is This”

UMH #219

INTERCESSIONS

INTERCESSOR:

In the spirit of this season, let us now ask our God for what we need for ourselves as we participate in the Christmas season as people coping with loss, pain, suffering, loneliness, grief, sadness. In response to the words, “Loving God, hear our prayer”, you are invited to respond with “And in your merciful love, answer.”

God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with pain growing inside 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,
And in your merciful love, answer.

INTERCESSOR

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. Once it was a special day for us too, but someone has died or moved away. Or we have lost a job, or a cause. We find ourselves adrift, alone, lost. Lord help us find our way. Loving God, hear our prayer,
And in your merciful love, answer.

INTERCESSOR

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. All around us we hear the sounds of celebration. But all we experience is a sense of feeling blue. Please be near us this night. Loving God, hear our prayer,
And in your merciful love, answer.

LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN "Come and Fill Our Hearts With Your Peace" TFWS #2157

LIGHTING CANDLES OF REMEMBRANCE

Each of us comes tonight with our own hurts, sorrows and broken places. At this time we invite you to light a candle at home as we light candles in this space. God's deepest desire is to shoulder with us our hurt and pain. Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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." (Matthew 11:28-30a)

SPECIAL MUSIC "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

CLOSING HYMN "I Want to Walk As a Child of the Light" 206

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

May you find the blessings of this Holy Season, as you encounter darkness,
 May you find comfort and healing in the Light of God's Love!! Amen.

*—adapted from: Sacraments and Seasons: Peacemaking Through Worship
 from Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.- <http://minnedosaunited.blogspot.com/2006/12/blue-christmas-service-december-21st.html>*