

Longest Night Service



Welcome

Christmas always seems to be accompanied by jolly songs, ringing bells, and the expectation that you will have a good time. But that's not how it feels for many people. Maybe your year has been hard – for whatever reason – and Christmas seems to highlight the difficulties. Or maybe in an over-busy life, you just want space to reflect, recall, regroup.

Whatever the reason, whatever the need, you are welcome here. We hope that you will find the space and hope which the Christmas story offers.

We remain seated for the whole service. Please join in as much or as little as you wish: the words we say together are in bold type; we shall gently sing the carols; there is an opportunity to place and light candles during our time together. Or simply rest, be still, and hear the mystery of the Christmas story.

Opening Responses

We meet in the name of a loving God.

**All: Who knows our needs, Hears our cries
And heals our wounds.**

The first candle we light
is to remember those whom we have loved and lost.
We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice,
the memory that binds them to us in this season.

We pause as the candle is lit

All: May God's eternal love surround them.

The second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss,
the loss of someone who was very important to us,
part of our lives, part of our own selves.
We pause to gather up the pain of the past
and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands
we receive the gift of peace.

We pause as the candle is lit

**All: Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us
into your future.**

The third candle we light
is to remember ourselves this Christmas time.
We pause and remember these past weeks and months,
the disbelief, the anger, the down times,
the poignancy of reminiscing,
the hugs and handshakes of family and friends,
all those who stood with us.
We give thanks for all the support we have known.

We pause as the candle is lit

**All: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness,
life overcomes death.**

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

We pause as the candle is lit

**All: Let us remember the One who shows the way,
Who brings the truth and who bears the light.**

*The large Christ candle will remain unlit as a sign of waiting
for a future that is yet unknown to us, from which God
beckons us.*

Placing of candles

*During this carol you are invited to place your unlit candle by the
four lit candles, as a symbol of our longing for light in the darkness.*

Carol: 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 thee, O Israel.***

**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.**

Chorus

**O come, thou Day-spring, 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.***

Readings

Reading 1: Luke chapter 2, verses 1-7

Poem: Birth

Carol: O Little Town

**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.**

**O morning stars together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King
And peace to all on earth.
For Christ is born of Mary;
And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.**

**How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given.
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessing 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, Immanuel!**

Readings

Reading 2: Luke chapter 2, verses 8-20

Poem: Shepherds

Carol: Away in a Manger

**Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.**

**The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes;
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
And stay by my bedside, till morning is nigh.**

**Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care
And fit us for heaven, to be with thee there.**

Reading

Reading 3: Matthew chapter 2, verses 1-12

Poem: Magi

Carol: In the bleak midwinter

**In the bleak midwinter
Frosty wind made moan.
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen,
snow on snow, Snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.**

**Our God, heav'n cannot hold him,
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.**

**What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him, give my heart.**

Reading

Reading 4: Matthew chapter 2, verses 13-15

Poem: Flight

Prayers

We hold a time of silence, in which we bring to God, in the quiet of this night, those things which are on our hearts at this time.

Loving God, we pray in confidence
that you will come to us now,
As you have come to your people in every age,
As we gather our thoughts in the words
that the adult Christ taught us:

**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 trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.**

Carol: Silent Night

As we sing 'Silent Night' if you wish, come forward and light your unlit candle, as a reminder that in the darkness, in the messiness, in the coldness of life, the Christmas story of God in Christ, breaking into the world, offers hope that light will come with the morning.

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.

Silent night, Holy night!

Shepherds quail at the sight,

Glory streams from heaven afar,

Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!

Christ the Saviour is born. Christ the Saviour is born.

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.

Blessing

Please feel free to stay in the quiet for as long as you need.

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