



A SERVICE FOR THE LONGEST NIGHT

DECEMBER 21, 2023 | 6:00 PM

GATHERING

PRAYER FOR MEDITATION: *God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy, and love that you promise to all of your people through the gift of your son Jesus. Amen.*

PRELUDE

What Sweeter Music
Dr. Terry McRoberts

arr. by Rutter

WELCOME

Rev. John White

CALL TO WORSHIP

Rev. John White

One: In the beginning was the Word,
ALL: *and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
One: All things were made by God;
ALL: *without God nothing came to be.*
One: What came to be through God was life,
ALL: *and this life was the light of the world.*
One: The Light shines in the darkness,
ALL: *and the darkness can never overcome it.*

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Rev. John White + Rev. Courtney Bowen

One: We light the candle of Hope as we await the coming of Jesus, who is our source of hope.
(candle of hope is lit)
ALL: **Thank you, Lord, for the gift of hope, in our times of emptiness.**
One: We light the candle of Peace, knowing that Jesus is the Prince of Peace.
(candle of peace is lit)
ALL: **Thank you, Lord, for the gift of peace in our times of uncertainty.**
One: We light the candle of Joy, knowing that our comfort and help come from God.
(candle of joy is lit)
ALL: **Thank you, Lord, for the gift of joy in our times of sadness.**
One: We light the candle of Love, knowing that God is love revealed to us in Jesus Christ.
(candle of love is lit)
ALL: **Thank you, Lord, for the gift of love in our times of loneliness.**
One: Let us pray: O God, come to our assistance. We have gathered here this evening because we long for you to come to us, to save us, to comfort us, to bring us peace. As we approach the day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we grow in our awareness that we need you. We bring our grief, our pains, our disappointments, our fears and the chaos of our world, and we lay all that before you in this time of

worship. As Jesus embodied your love for the world and became “God-with-us,”
so now this night we pray that you would again, come, oh come, Emmanuel.

ALL: *Amen.*

***HYMN: 88** *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (verses 1, 4, 6, and 7) VENI EMMANUEL

FIRST READING *Psalm 139:1-12* *Rev. Courtney Bowen*

MOMENT FOR MEDITATION

***HYMN: 347** *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* PICARDY

SECOND READING *Matthew 11:28-29* *Rev. John White*

MOMENT FOR MEDITATION

***HYMN: 471** *O Lord, Hear My Prayer* (3 times) HEAR MY PRAYER

THIRD READING *Romans 8:18-27, 37-39* *Rev. Courtney Bowen*

MOMENT FOR MEDITATION

SPECIAL MUSIC *In the Bleak Midwinter* Holst / Courtney
Susannah White, soloist

FOURTH READING *Revelation 21:1-7* *Rev. John White*

MOMENT FOR MEDITATION

***HYMN: 836** *Abide with Me* EVENTIDE

RESPONSIVE PRAYER *Rev. Courtney Bowen*

One: Loving God, in this season of Advent we give thanks that you came to be among us.

ALL: *Emmanuel, God with us.*

One: You came into the darkness of that time:

ALL: *a time of change and stress, uncertainty and doubt.*

One: You did not enter this world surrounded by grand things.

ALL: *You were born in a stable, to parents far from home.*

One: O God, we pray for your presence here and now, in the difficulties of our time.

ALL: *We lay before you our offerings of honesty and need, of worry and hope.*

One: For all who are grieving, we pray:

ALL: *O Lord, you know what it means to lose someone you dearly love.*

One: For all who are lonely, we pray:

ALL: *O Lord, you know how it feels to look around you and feel there is no one left.*

One: For all who are anxious, we pray:
ALL: *O Lord, you know what it is like to be weary and heavy-laden.*
 One: For all who are vulnerable, we pray:
ALL: *O Lord, you know what it means to be unhoused and unsafe.*
 One: For all who are beset by challenges, physical or emotional, we pray:
ALL: *O Lord, you know how it feels to be in pain.*
 One: For all who are longing for light, and for hope, we pray:
ALL: *O Lord, you know what it is like to wait in the darkness.*
(we offer our personal petitions in silence)
 One: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you came to be among us,
ALL: *full of grace and truth.*
 One: In you we find our welcome.
ALL: *You are our comfort and our company along the journey of our life.*
 One: In Jesus' name, we pray.
ALL: *Amen.*

***HYMN: 792** *There is a Balm in Gilead*

SPRINGTIME

INVITATION INTO CHRIST'S PRESENCE

Rev. John White

At this time, all are encouraged to silently name a particular need that you wish to acknowledge to the Lord. Then, please come forward to light a candle or light a candle in your home if you are joining remotely. As you do, invite the light of Christ into your heart, trusting that Christ came into the world to be with us, wherever we are.

UNISON PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Rev. John White

Gracious God, 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. Wrap your everlasting arms around us; swaddle us in the security of your love; comfort us with the silence of your quiet breath; brighten our path with the light of your presence. Refresh us, encourage us, empower us. We pray this in the name of your Son, who taught us to pray together, saying "Our Father, who art in heaven..."

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Rev. John White & Rev. Courtney Bowen

**INVITATION TO THE TABLE
 PRAYER OF GREAT THANKSGIVING
 SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS
 CLOSING PRAYER**

***HYMN: 676** *Day is Done*

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BENEDICTION

Rev. John White

POSTLUDE

The First Nowell
 Dr. Terry McRoberts

arr. by Pethel