



The CENTER
for Christian Spirituality



Bethlehem Star 2, Virginia Wieringa

Service of the Longest Night

A Reminder of Hope in the Midst of Grief

6:00 p.m. + December 18, 2022 + Fourth Sunday of Advent

Blessed are you who bear the light in unbearable times, who testify to its endurance amid the unendurable, who bear witness to its persistence when everything seems in shadow and grief.

Blessed are you in whom the light lives, in whom the brightness blazes — your heart a chapel, an altar where in the deepest night can be seen the fire that shines forth in you in unaccountable faith, in stubborn hope, in love that illumines every broken thing it finds.

Jan Richardson

Entering Worship and Centering (with sung response)

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

- ❖ Take a moment to be still and center yourself. Just sit still.
You need not make anything happen. . . .
O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. . .
- ❖ As best you can, release fear, anxiety, and stress. Let them drop away from you. . . .
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.
- ❖ Consciously bring yourself *just as you are* to this moment of worship. God loves the real *you*.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Remembering and Praying

We gather here on this long night, God,

daring to bring ourselves as we are.

We gather here with you, God, and with others,

in our need and bringing with us the pain of the hurting world.

We come to you, for you come to us in Jesus,

and you are Immanuel, God with us.

We come with our sadness and our joy,

we come with our doubts and our faith,

We come with our tears and our laughter,

we come with our fears and our hopes.

We come as we are, because you invite us to come;

and you have promised never to turn us away.

Longing and Rejoicing

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer

Our spirits by thy 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.

O Come, Desire of nations bind

All peoples in one heart and mind.

From dust thou brought us forth to life;

Deliver us from earthly strife,

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

Welcome

Lighting the Way: Remembering Our Losses and Whispering the Names

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.

(Pause while the first candle is lit. You are invited to whisper aloud the names of your loved ones.)

O Loving God,

may Your Eternal Love surround them.

For Those Who Make a Difficult Journey Tonight

“It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,

from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:

"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all-gracious King."

The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,

who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,

look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.

O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!

Listening for the Good Word

Silence

Lighting the Way: Redeeming Our Pain

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.

(Pause while the second candle is lit.)

*O Loving God,
refresh, restore, renew us,
and lead us into Your future.*

Sung Response

"In the Bleak Midwinter"

*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.*

Psalm Reading

Psalm 39 (A Book of Psalms)

*Unnamable, unthinkable God, Lord of the dead and the living,
teach us how transient we are and how fragile is everything we love.
For all of us flash into being, as insubstantial as a breath.
Our lives are a fleeting shadow; then we vanish into the night.
And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My only trust is in you.
Help me to give up my desires and to let go of who I am.
You have granted me this brief existence, which is almost nothing in your sight:
may I receive it gratefully and gratefully give it back.
Turn toward me; touch my spirit; stay beside me,
until the moment when I must step out into your final darkness. Amen.*

Silence

Lighting the Way: Remembering Our Community

*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.*

(Pause while the third candle is lit.)

*O Loving God,
help us remember that dawn defeats darkness,
life overcomes death.*

Opening Ourselves to the Christ Who Comes

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

*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.*

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
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;
Oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*

Lighting the Way: Remembering Our Hope

*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.*

(Pause while the fourth candle is lit.)

*O Loving God,
help us remember You,
the One who shows the way,
Who brings the truth and Who bears the light.*

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

Invitation

"Come Unto Me"

Receiving Holy Communion and Lighting Candles

Benediction

Watch now, dear Lord, with those who wake or watch or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ, rest your weary ones, bless your dying ones, soothe your suffering ones, have mercy on your afflicted ones, shield your joyous ones, give peace to your grieving ones, and all for your Love's sake. Amen.

*And now may the God of hope fill us with all steadfastness and peace in believing,
that we may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Our Staff

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