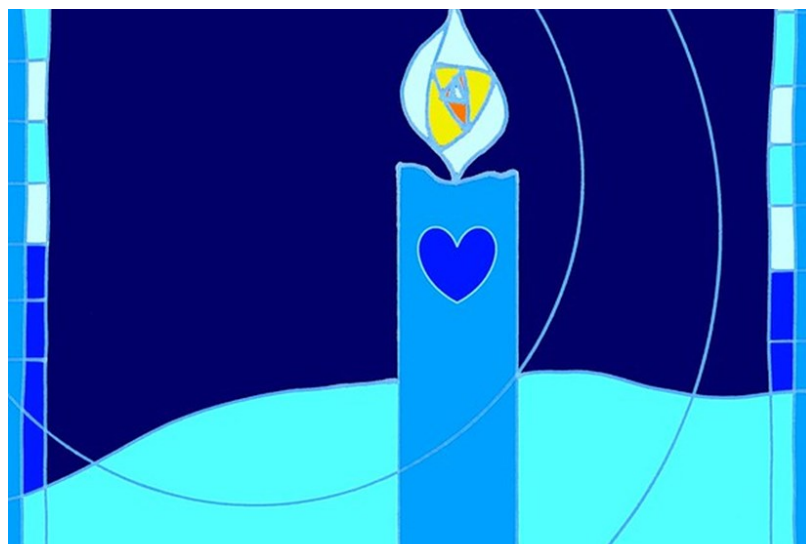


SAINT MARTINS LUTHERAN CHURCH
Annapolis, Maryland



Into this silent night
as we make our weary way
we know not where,
just when the night becomes its darkest
and we cannot see our path,
just then is when the angels rush in,
their hands full of stars.

Ann Weems, Kneeling at Bethlehem

S E R V I C E O F T H E L O N G E S T N I G H T

T H U R S D A Y , D E C E M B E R 2 1 , 2 0 2 3

Bold print indicates that the congregation joins in reading.

▪ **SERVING IN WORSHIP TODAY** ▪

Presider & Celebrant

Rev. Dr. David G. Oravec

Director of Music Ministry

Junghoon Park

Assisting Minister

Chaplain Paula Thistle

Lector

Linda Wetz

Communion Assistants

Chaplain Paula Thistle

Linda Wetz

Media Technician

Sara Wetz

Prelude Brahms: My Inmost Heart Doth Yearn, Op. 122 No. 10

Call to Worship

In the midst of a world where sickness, grief and pain abound,
We come to find a God who took on flesh and joins us in our hurt.
In the midst of a world where people hunger and thirst,
We come to find a God who feeds the hungry.
In the midst of a world where people are abused and oppressed,
We come to find a God who calls for compassion and justice.
In the midst of a world filled with wars and rumor of war,
We come to find a God who desires nothing less than peace for the world.
In the midst of a world of spiritual emptiness,
We come to find a God who gives life meaning.
Come: worship a God whose grace and love know no end.

Hymn:

“Lost in the Night”

ELW 243



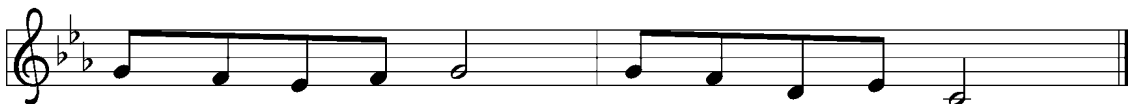
1 Lost in the night do the peo - ple yet lan - guish,
2 Must we be vain - ly a - wait - ing the mor - row?
3 Sor - row - ing wan - d'ers, in dark - ness yet dwell - ing,
4 Light o'er the land of the need - y is beam - ing;



long - ing for morn - ing the dark - ness to van - quish,
Shall those who have light no light let us bor - row,
dawned has the day of a ra - diance ex - cel - ling,
riv - ers of life through its des - erts are stream - ing,



plain - tive - ly sigh - ing with hearts full of an - guish.
giv - ing no heed to our bur - den of sor - row?
death's deep - est shad - ows for - ev - er dis - pel - ling.
bring - ing all peo - ples a Sav - ior re - deem - ing.



Will not day come soon?	Will not day come soon?
Will you help us soon?	Will you help us soon?
Christ is com - ing soon!	Christ is com - ing soon!
Come and save us soon!	Come and save us soon!

Text: Nordic hymn; tr. Olav Lee, 1859–1943, alt.
Music: LOST IN THE NIGHT, Finnish folk tune
Text © 1932 Augsburg Publishing House, admin. Augsburg Fortress

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Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, in the quiet of the evening, we come to you, trusting that you hear our prayer. We gather now, seeking your peace and comfort. We come with feelings of sadness, anger, numbness, hurt, relief and hope. We know that your love is deep enough and profound enough to accept our feelings, our fears and our longings that go beyond words. Just as candles break through the darkness of a room, let your light, dear Christ, break through the darkness of our souls. Give us the courage to open our eyes and hearts to your healing love. We pray in the name of Jesus, Our Christ. Amen.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath: *A Litany of Remembering*

The Gospel of John uses the image of light to describe the power of Jesus Christ. He is the light that is so bright that there is no darkness dark enough to put it out. The Advent wreath is a symbol of the power of the light of Christ. We light the first candle tonight to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices, and the memories that bind them to us this season.

[Silence]

Bless our memories, O God.

May your eternal love surround them, O God.

We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health ... all the losses we suffer. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and to offer it to God, asking God to give us the gift of peace and patience with ourselves.

[Silence]

Receive our pain, O God.

**Refresh, restore, and renew us, O God,
and help us to trust you to lead us into the future.**

The third candle we light to remember ourselves this Christmas season. We pause and remember these past weeks and months: the disbelief, the anger, the tears, the down times—the reminiscing, the hugs and handshakes, the quiet listening of family and friends. We give thanks for the support of those who stand with us and love us.

[Silence]

Bless us, O God.

Remind us that your light shines in our time of darkness, O God.

We light the fourth candle to remember the gift of hope that the Christmas story offers: The Word became flesh and lived among us, knows our pain, conquered pain and death, and continues to be present with us.

[Silence]

Thank you, God.

**Emmanuel means “God with us.”
May God rekindle our faith.**

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 all, 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.

Unison Prayer

Merciful God, you know us inside and out. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.

Assurance of Acceptance

There are times when all we see is the darkness; we may cry out, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." But, God says to us, "I shall never forget you! I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands."

By the grace of Christ we are accepted and loved by God. Amen.

Reading from the Prophets: Isaiah 9:2,4,6-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. ... For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ... For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reading from the Psalms: Psalm 121 (responsively)

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 forevermore.

Reading from the Gospel: Luke 2:8-14

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.
⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Silence for reflection

Homily

Hymn: “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

ELW 254

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee.
Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit raise us to Thy glorious throne.

The Passing of Peace and Reception of Offering

The Words of Institution and Lord's Prayer

Together we share the Meal and receive the Blessing

Hymn: "Silent Night, Holy Night"

ELW 281

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!

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

Benediction

Postlude

Chopin: Nocturne, Op. 27 No.2



Blessing for the Longest Night

All throughout these months
as the shadows
have lengthened,
this blessing has been
gathering itself,
making ready,
preparing for
this night.
It has practiced
walking in the dark,
traveling with
its eyes closed,
feeling its way
by memory
by touch
by the pull of the moon
even as it wanes.
So believe me
when I tell you
this blessing will
reach you
even if you
have not light enough
to read it;
it will find you
even though you cannot
see it coming.

You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;
a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.
This blessing
does not mean
to take the night away
but it knows
its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,
knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.

So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.
Get up.
Set out on the road
you cannot see.
This is the night
when you can trust
that any direction
you go,
you will be walking
toward the dawn.