



Longest Night Service
December 20, 2023
6:30 p.m.

Grace Lutheran Church
5201 Urbandale Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50310

Introduction

The winter solstice is the longest night and the beginning of winter in the northern hemisphere.

In a few days many of us will gather to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, the arrival of Jesus Christ, God in human form. December 25 is celebrated as Christmas because it had been incorrectly identified as the winter solstice. What the early Christians intended for this feast was not a birthday party for baby Jesus but rather a feast of proclamation. God arrives by way of deep darkness. Christians wanted to tell the world that God, the maker of the cosmos, chose to lovingly draw near to our broken world by way of a human birth on the longest night of the year. God's love for us goes deep and does not fade or change with the seasons. It is richer and more plentiful than the darkness of night, blazing brighter than the noonday sun of late June.

For many, the lack of daylight intensifies other suffering. The weight of depression grows heavier when light is scarce. We get stressed out when our calendars fill with extra social obligations. We fear interactions with family members that have been difficult in the past. What an opportunity, then, to share that the message of Christmas is specifically sent for those in pain and suffering. It is not that "all is merry and bright." Rather, it is the abiding truth that God seeks to be with us, even when we are "blue."

While it is true that our preindustrial forebears had legitimate reasons to be afraid of the dark, it is also true that we repeat racist binaries that have led to the violent deaths of people of color when Christians associate darkness with pain and lightness with healing. A night like this and a feast like Christmas are fruitful encounters with healing darkness. God-with-us is here to guide us into paths of love and practices of justice.

Prelude "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" - plain song chant
arranged by D. Lanz

Welcome and Greeting

L: The light of our Lord Jesus Christ, the warmth of God,
and the hope of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Gathering Song – “Now it is Evening” ELW 572



1 Now it is eve-ning: lights of the cit - y bid us re - mem-ber
2 Now it is eve-ning: food on the ta - ble bids us re - mem-ber
3 Now it is eve-ning: lit - tle ones sleep-ing bid us re - mem-ber
4 Now it is eve-ning: here in our meet-ing may we re - mem-ber

Christ is our light. Man - y are lone - ly, who will be
Christ is our life. Man - y are hun - gry, who will be
Christ is our peace. Some are ne - glect - ed, who will be
Christ is our friend. Some may be strang - ers, who will be

neigh-bor? Where there is car - ing, Christ is our light.
neigh-bor? Where there is shar - ing, Christ is our life.
neigh-bor? Where there is car - ing, Christ is our peace.
neigh-bor? Where there's a wel - come, Christ is our friend.

Text: Fred Pratt Green, 1903–2000

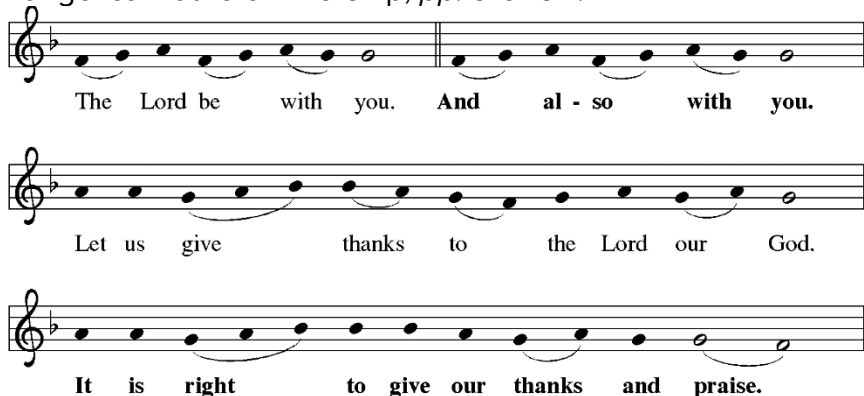
Music: BOZEMAN, Rusty Edwards, b. 1955

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Thanksgiving for Light

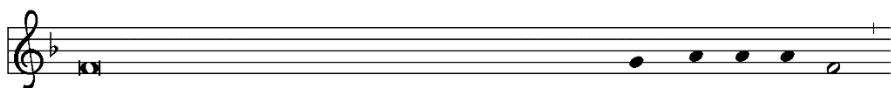
Evangelical Lutheran Worship, *pp.* 310–311.



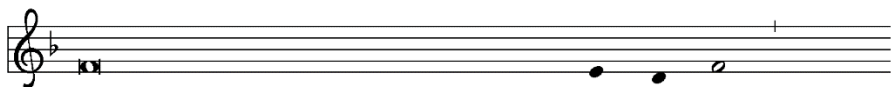
The Lord be with you. And al - so with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

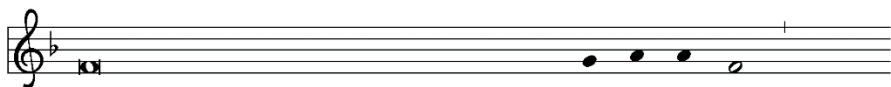
It is right to give our thanks and praise.



We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you called light in - to being,



and you set lights in the sky to govern night and day.



In a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night



you led your peo - ple in - to freedom.



Enlighten our darkness by the light of your Christ; may your Word be



a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for you are mer-ci - ful,



and you love your whole cre-a-tion, and with all your crea-tures we give you glory,



through your Son Je - sus Christ, in the unity of the Ho - ly Spirit,



now and for - ev - er. **A - men.**

Psalms 27

L: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

C: When evildoers close in against me to devour my flesh, they, my foes and my enemies, will stumble and fall.

L: Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear. Though war rise up against me, my trust will not be shaken.

C: One thing I ask of the Lord; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek God in the temple.

L: For in the day of trouble God will give me shelter, hide me in the hidden places of the sanctuary, and raise me high upon a rock.

C: Even now my head is lifted up above my enemies who surround me. Therefore I will offer sacrifice in the sanctuary, sacrifices of rejoicing; I will sing and make music to the Lord.

L: Hear my voice, O Lord, when I call; have mercy on me and answer me.

C: My heart speaks your message— “Seek my face.” Your face, O Lord, I will seek.

L: Hide not your face from me, turn not away from your servant in anger. Cast me not away—you have been my helper; forsake me not, O God of my salvation.

C: Though my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in.

L: Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me on a level path, because of my oppressors.

C: Subject me not to the will of my foes, for they rise up against me, false witnesses breathing violence.

L: This I believe—that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!

C: Wait for the Lord and be strong. Take heart and wait for the Lord!

Prayer

L: Creator of the stars of night, bless the long hours of this night with the warmth of your presence. Come to all who suffer in any way. Grant rest to the weary, freedom to those who are burdened, and bright hope to those who despair. Strengthen us as we await your coming once again, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: Amen.

Reading - Isaiah 40:1-11

¹Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

L: The Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God

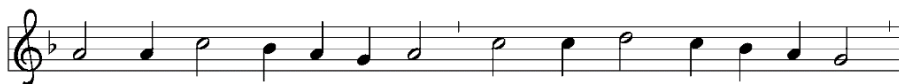
Song – “Comfort, comfort now my people” ELW 256



1 “Com - fort, com-fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!” So says our God.
2 For the her-ald’s voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
3 Straight shall be what long was crook - ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain.



Com-fort those who sit in dark - ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row’s load.
call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the reign of God is here.
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be - fits God’s ho - ly reign.



To God’s peo - ple now pro-claim that God’s par - don waits for them!
Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way.
For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for-ev - er.
Val - leys, rise to greet the Sav - ior; hills, bow down in hum-ble fa - vor.
and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God’s word is nev - er bro - ken.

Text: Johann G. Olearius, 1635–1711; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878, alt.
Music: FREU DICH SEHR, *Trente quatre psaumes de David*, Geneva, 1551

Reading - Revelation 22:1-5

¹Then the angel^[a] showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life^[b] with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

L: The Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God

Song - Of the Father's Love Begotten ELW 295



1 Of the Fa - ther's love be - got - ten ere the worlds be -
 2 Oh, that birth for - ev - er bless - ed, when the vir - gin,
 3 This is he whom seers in old time chant - ed of with
 4 Let the heights of heav'n a - dore him; an - gel hosts, his
 5 Christ, to thee, with God the Fa - ther, and, O Ho - ly



gan to be, he is Al - pha and O - me - ga,
 full of grace, by the Ho - ly Ghost con - ceiv - ing,
 one ac - cord, whom the voic - es of the proph - ets
 prais - es sing; pow'rs, do - min - ions, bow be - fore him
 Ghost, to thee, hymn and chant and high thanks - giv - ing



he the source, the end - ing he, of the things that are, that
 bore the Sav - ior of our race, and the babe, the world's re -
 prom-ised in their faith - ful word; now he shines, the long - ex -
 and ex - tol our God and King; let no tongue on earth be -
 and un - wea - ried prais - es be: hon - or, glo - ry, and do -



have been, and that fu - ture years shall see,
 deem - er, first re - vealed his sa - cred face,
 pect - ed; let cre - a - tion praise its Lord
 si - lent, ev - 'ry voice in con - cert ring
 min - ion, and e - ter - nal vic - to - ry



ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
 ev - er - more and ev - er - more! A - men.

Reading - John 1:1-5

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

L: The Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God

Reflection

Prayers

L: In your great mercy,

C: hear us, O God.

Healing and Anointing

Those who wish to receive laying on of hands (and anointing) approach and, as conditions permit, they may kneel.

The minister will anoint the person's forehead with oil (if desired), making the sign of the cross, and then lays both hands on each person's head, and offers a prayer. After all have received, we will observe a time of silence before the service continues.

L: Let us pray.

L: Living God, through the laying on of hands and anointing, grant comfort in suffering to all who are in need of healing. When they are afraid, give them courage; when afflicted, give them patience; when dejected, give them hope; and when alone, assure them of the support of your holy people.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing

L: May God bless you and keep you.

May God's holy darkness enfold you and grant you rest.

May God nourish a seed of hope among us.

C: Amen.

Song - Wait for the Lord ELW 262

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Text: Taizé Community

Music: WAIT FOR THE LORD, Jacques Berthier, 1923-1994

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Dismissal

L: The peace of Christ be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Greetings of peace may be shared as the assembly departs.

Postlude

“Forgotten Dreams”

L. Anderson

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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Mary

Based on Luke 1:46-55, written by the Rev. Sarah Speed

When I was young, my church hosted a Christmas pageant. Families would show up on Christmas Eve with diaper bags and children thrown over their shoulders. No amount of Silent Night could quiet that room. It was a holy and beautiful chaos.

What was special about that church Christmas pageant was we, the children, got to pick our character in the story. So, for one night, we could be Magi in Burger King crowns. We could be angels with wings made of clothes hangers. We could be shepherds in bathrobes, protecting the flock. We could be Mary, beautiful and brave.

And the preacher would stand on the steps and tell us the Christmas story, and as our character entered the scene, We would run down the center aisle and assume our place at the manger. (As an aside: Is there anything more holy than seeing a child run down that center aisle, as if getting closer to God is all they have in mind?)

And as the story progressed, the front steps would become crowded With dozens of Magi and a wide array of animals, But I would always choose Mary.

I would always choose Mary— Mary the teen mom.
Mary who said, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Mary who sang.

For even at that age, even as a child,
We could tell that Mary was afraid, and into that dark, Mary sang.

So, I and most of the other little girls in the church that night,
Would tighten the blue bed sheets draped around our shoulders, And run down the center aisle when our name was called. For in that moment, we were on our way. In that moment, we were those who dream. In that moment, we were all Mary. In that moment, we were brave.

Welcome to Grace!

Ministers —the people of Grace

Pastor –

The Rev. Michael Schmidt.....mike@gracedm.org

Vicar

Adam Bardenadam@gracedm.org

Organist –

Rich Snyder.....rich@gracedm.org

Minister for Communications –

Michelle Voelker.....michelle@gracedm.org

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Kami Chicas.....kami@gracedm.org

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Mike Hilsabeck.....mike.h@gracedm.org

Office Assistant for Worship

Jessica Flannery.....jessica@gracedm.org

Custodian – Todd Haugen

Altar Guild – Sue Anderson & Carol Woodruff

Tech Crew – Greg Boeschen, Jamie Briggs, Chuck Denton, Paul Nelson, Jon Rissman, & Amy Schmelzer

Counters – Tom McCleary & Mark Stumme



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