

**A COMBINED MINISTRY OF
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
AND
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA

The Longest Night: A Service of Hope

December 21, 2020

6:00 p.m.

Words for Silent Prayer and Reflection before Worship

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

-Isaiah 40:1-

WESTMINSTER STRIKE

WORDS OF WELCOME

Fred Lyon

PRELUDE

David Jennings and Saxon Scarborough

CALL TO WORSHIP

Lisa Marisaddaiah

Today we come looking for the Christ Child and the hope that his birth offers.

We come, bringing our hurts, our worries, our fears. We come bringing our disappointments, our grief and our sadness.

We come seeking relief from a year now ending that has brought us many unwelcomed challenges. With the psalmist of old we say,

“O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low.”

SHARED PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Holy God, we bring to you our grief—our own and the grief of others in the world. We lament from the dark places on this longest night. We are fearful, angry, alone. Remind us tonight that darkness is as light to you and that you are Emmanuel, God with us. Comfort us once again with the knowledge that you join us and love us in our fear, anger and loneliness. May we allow you to be with us, to provide, heal, comfort and attend to us in the darkest of times. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew Burton

Isaiah 40 (selected verses)

THE LIGHTING OF THE FIRST CANDLE

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their faces, their voices, their bodies. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation, when all creation waits for the Light.

We remember them with love. May God’s eternal love surround them.

SILENT REFLECTION

THE LIGHTING OF THE SECOND CANDLE

Avery White

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of a normal way of life, loss of faith, loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to you, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands you will place the gift of shalom, true peace.

We remember that through you, O God, all things are possible.

ANTHEM

Bethany Jennings

“Lord of the Small” arr. Dan Forrest

SCRIPTURE READING

Fred Lyon

Psalm 91 (selected verses)

THE LIGHTING OF THE THIRD CANDLE

We light the third candle to remember ourselves this Christmastime. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with burdens. We accept and lay before you, O God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness of grief, the hurt and disappointment, the pain and frustration. We accept and lay before you the ways we have fallen short, the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered or endured.

We remember that we have journeyed far, and, while lost at times we have turned away from the light. Yet, we acknowledge that the light itself has not failed us. We remember that though the Longest Night be upon us and the winter is now before us, though the night be dark, the darkness will be defeated.

SILENT REFLECTION

THE LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH CANDLE

John Stanley

We light the fourth candle to remember the hope, peace, joy and love that God offers to us in the story of Christmas, a story that began in abandonment, insecurity and humbleness, in a time of war, in an animal stable, to a peasant couple. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us, promises us comfort and peace tonight.

We remember the One who shares our burden, who shows us the way ahead, and who journeys with us into all of our tomorrows. We give thanks for Emmanuel, God with us.

SCRIPTURE READING

Rebecca Greene

Luke 2:1-7

SHARING THE LIGHT

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lauren Vanacore

HYMN

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set they 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 nations,
joy of every longing heart.

Born they people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now they 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.

†BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Another day will come and new mercies will we see. This Christmastide, may God support you all the day long and grant you holy rest and peace at last this Christmas and into the New Year.

†POSTLUDE

David Jennings

Worship Leaders:

Rev. Fred Lyon - First Presbyterian Church
Rev. Lauren Sease Vanacore - First Presbyterian Church
Pastor John Stanley - First Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Matthew Burton - First United Methodist Church
Rev. Avery White - First United Methodist Church
Rev. Rebecca Green - First United Methodist Church

Lisa Marisiddaiah - Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry

David Jennings, organ - First Presbyterian Church
Saxon Scarborough, cello - First United Methodist Church
Bethany Jennings, soloist - First Presbyterian Church
Celeste Crowe, A/V, Livestream - First Presbyterian Church

Selections of this service are based on an order developed and used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu, Hawaii; and, upon an order of worship, "Blue Christmas: A Service of Healing and Wholeness," by Jean Givens, PHN, Blue Christmas - A Service of Wholeness and Healing (presbyterianmission.org); and, upon an order of worship by Kasey Hitt, M.Div, CSD, Longest Night of the Year Service - Kasey Hitt, MDiv, CSD (khspiritualdirection.com).

