

The Anglican Parish of St. Peter, Quamichan

THE LONGEST NIGHT

A SERVICE OF COMFORT AND LIGHT
IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

DECEMBER 21, 2020



Opening Acknowledgement:

Officiant: In this time and place, we gather on the unceded ancestral territories of the Coast Salish people and the Cowichan Tribes.
In this time and place we gather in the name of the living God.
In this time and place we gather with the community of faith around the globe and across the ages
In this time and place we are not alone, but on in Christ
In this time and place Hallowed, expectant, one people in God

All: In this time and place heaven and earth are one. In the name of the Holy and Blessed one, Creator, Redeemer and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.*

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

*O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
who orderest all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.*

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

THE GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY

Leader: The Grace of The Holy One, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you all.

People: And also with you.

Leader: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone. For the yoke that was weighing upon them, and the burden upon their shoulders, you have broken in pieces, O God, our Redeemer.

Leader: Together, let us prayer:

People: God of mercy, hear our prayer in this season of Advent, we pray for ourselves and for all who live with painful thoughts and memories. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

A Reading from the book of Isaiah (40:1, 25-31)

Reader: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? Says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.
Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God'?

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Reader: Here what the Spirit is saying to God's people

People: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 121

Reader: I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where is my help to come?

People: My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and Earth.

Reader: He will not let your foot be moved and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.

People: Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Reader: The Lord himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

People: So that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

Reader: The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe.

People: The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for ever more.

Reader: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

People: As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew (11:28-30)

Deacon: Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Deacon: Here what the Spirit is saying to God's people

People: Thanks be to God.

Hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel

*O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save,
and give them victory over the grave.*

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

A LITURGY OF REMEMBRANCE

Lighting of Four Advent Candles

First Candle

Leader: We light the first candle to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their voice, their face, the memory that binds them to us in this season. We hold them before God, giving thanks for their lives in ours.

I invite you to take a moment to remember those who have died, please name them, aloud or in the silence of your hearts....

All: Lord, each of us takes our loved one by the hand and leads them to you, the God of love. Here we present them to you. Accept our love and thanksgiving as we entrust them to your loving care. We want our loved ones to be free at home with you. We ask that you save a place for us beside them. We ask that you fill us with motivation and energy in the days ahead when we feel like giving up; remind us often of our true homeland when we are caught up in the desolation of the journey. Help us to find joy in the people, events and the beauty of nature, which surrounds us.

Thank you for the gift each of these people has been in our lives. We want to believe that we will celebrate the treasure of love with them again, when we are all in your presence forever. May this truth sustain us in the days to come. Take our sad and aching hearts and comfort us. Comfort us, for we only feel hollowness and emptiness. God of sorrowing draw near! Amen.

Hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel

*O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine 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.

Second Candle

Leader: We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs with the security they bring, the loss of health in ourselves or in family members, the loss of joy and peace in our lives from the stresses which surround us, the loss and loneliness we experience when our loved ones do not share our faith. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.

I invite you to take a moment to name the losses. Please name them, aloud or in the silence of your hearts....

All: God of mystery, we turn our hearts to you. We come before you in need of peace, grateful for the mystery of life and ever keenly aware of your promises of guidance and protection. We want to place our trust in you, but our hearts grow fearful and anxious. We forget so easily that you will be with us in all that we experience. Teach us to be patient with the transformation of our lives and to be open to the changes, which we are now going through. Amen.

Hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel

*O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.*

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

Third Candle

Leader: We light the third candle for those who experience a loss of direction in their lives. God of the Exodus, you led Moses and your people through the wilderness to a new land. Hear our prayer. We want so much to have a sense of direction, to know where we are and where we ought to be headed. But the darkness and the questions stay. You ask us to be full of faith, to believe deep within that you are our signpost, that you are our wisdom and our guide, and to trust in your presence. Your words to us are clear: "Do not fear, I go before you."

All: God of our depths, we cry out to you to be our guide. Help us to have a strong sense of inner direction and grant that we may have the reassurance of knowing that we are on the right path. Take our lives and use them according to your will. Take all that is lost in us and bring it home with you. Amen.

Hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel

*O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times once gave the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.*

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

Fourth Candle

Leader: We light the fourth candle as a sign of hope, the hope that the story of the incarnation offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

All: O God whose spirit is known by those whose hearts are thankful, and who makes cheerfulness a companion of strength, lift up our hearts, we pray, to a joyous confidence in your care. Guide us when we cannot see the way. Teach us to know that a shadow is only a shadow, because the light of eternal goodness shines behind the object of our fears. Where there is love in life, teach us to find it; help us to trust it and enable us to grow in the power of love. So may our lives bring comfort and encouragement to others. We ask it, in the name of Jesus Christ whose life is our light. Amen.

Hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel

*O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,
an ensign of thy people be;
before thee rulers silent fall;
all peoples on thy mercy call.*

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

Prayers of the People

Leader: In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask our God for all the good things we need: For ourselves as we participate in this Christmas as special people coping with our many different losses. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Reader: For our families and friends, that they may continue to help and support us. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Reader: For any person we have loved who has died, for all the losses we know in our lives, that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Reader: For our family and friends, that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Reader: For peace throughout the world as proclaimed by the Christmas Angels on that faraway hillside. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Reader: For greater understanding of the lessons of love and acceptance as taught by Jesus your Christ. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Reader: God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, the blessing we ask in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray:

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Acts of Remembrance and Hope

Leader: Each of us comes bearing our own hurts, sorrows, broken places especially during these days of Advent, Christmas and certainly, in the time of COVID. I invite each of you to offer your personal wound to the God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry our pain. God waits patiently, gently calling out: "Give me your pain, come to me... all who labor and are heavy laden, I will refresh you!"

Light in the Midst of Darkness

Officiant: Before we begin this next piece of our longest night service. I invite each of you to take a moment to pause this recording and take a moment to gather a few items from your home if you have not done so already. I ask you to gather a candle to light, a stone, a small piece of paper and pen, a small bowl of water and a little pinch of salt before we move forward into our acts of remembrance and hope.

Officiant: I invite you now to take the candle placing it somewhere safe where you can see its light shining. As you light the candle, remember that it is God who lights a candle in our darkness and holds us close until we are able to shine with Him.

Washing Away Sorrow

Officiant: If we had been together in this place, we would be using the Baptismal font as a sign of the holiness of cleansing water. And while these are not 'normal' times, there is still a holiness that comes with the cleansing nature of water – At this time I invite you to take your stone, thinking of the sorrows, the anxieties, and the fears that you hold in your heart at this time. As you wash the stone, imagine God washing away your fears, anxieties and sorrows, just as the waters of our baptism wash us anew.

Naming Our Sorrow

Officiant: In this world where so much is unknown and sorrow and hurts come in many forms, it is important to name what it is, which holds us in places of darkness. I invite you now to take the piece of paper and the pen, and prayerfully write the name of the person or the situation that is causing you pain, sadness, or concern. When we are finished our service, I invite you to place this paper somewhere safe, and offer it unto God in prayer.

Giving Of Our Tears

Officiant: Again, keeping in mind the holiness of water, we will now use the salt, and the bowl of water as a way to honour our tears. Tears are God's gift to us, our own unique holy water. A deep release, tears come as a blessing, healing, cleansing, purging the sorrow flowing from within. I invite you now to slowly, prayerfully add the salt bit by bit to the water as a way of giving your tears to God, letting our tears become holy waters for all that has been lost this year, remembering that even in our sorrow, God is with us.

Officiant: Each of us comes to this time and this place bearing our own hurts, sorrow and broken places. This has been an unprecedented year of loss, anxiety, isolation, fear and sadness, but God has been with each of us every step of the way. Our God, of deep love and compassion hears our cries, heals the brokenhearted and bandages our wounds, even when days seem dark, we are never far from the Light and the love of God.

Closing

Leader: We now move back towards the advent wreath knowing that the flickering flames are a sign that we are never alone. We remember that these lights in their brightness are only symbols, but as they burn and finally go out, we know that even though memory remains, our suffering will pass.

Leader: Together, let us say,

All: As we gather together, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ Child this Christmas season. May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and marginal, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this Advent and Christmas season. Amen.

Hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel

*O come, Desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind;
bid thou our sad divisions cease,
and be thyself our King of Peace.*

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

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.*

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

Officiant: May the God of peace comfort your heart and illumine your spirit in the days to come, revealing the path from darkness to light. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always.

Deacon: May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through the darkness.

People: That together we may shine again. Amen.

At the Foot of the Cross (words and music by Barry DeSilva)

*1. There's a burden we bear, containing our cares,
That we take as we walk thru' our life.
It is full of our pain, our hurt and our strain,
And the weight of grief and strife.*

**Chorus: So lay it all down at the cross, He said He would take all our dross.
He said we could leave all our pain and our grief
Right there, at the foot of the cross.**

*2. When you travel the road, still bearing that load,
All the weight of the world rests on you.
But the pattern you break, give up all the ache,
When the Lord you take unto you. **Chorus...***

*3. It is safe to believe the burden you leave
At the foot of the cross sets you free.
At the cross you just kneel, His love for to feel,
When His child you choose to be. **Chorus...***

Officiant: Our service on this Longest Night, the shortest day, a time of darkness and reflection has come to an end. We pray that each of you may find comfort and joy as we celebrate this Christmas in one of the most unique ways. We remember that in that cave over 2000 years ago it was a small celebration, Mary and Joseph and a baby. That's all. Love was born and love continues now and forever more. Amen.

Note: The hymn "O come, O come, Emmanuel" is a song of people in darkness longing for God's light.

Note: This service is developed by Rev. MJ Leewis-Kirk, from a variety of sources across time, with thanks to Heather Hill, The Young Women Clergy project, the staff of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Libertyville, IL and many others who have cared and cried over the years.

Note: All Scripture comes from the NRSV.