

A winter landscape with snow-covered trees and a bright sun or moon in a hazy sky. The scene is framed by a black border.

The Longest Night

*A SERVICE OF LIGHT
IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS.*

Thornhill Presbyterian Church
Sunday December 20, 2020 – 7:30p.m.

Order of Worship

Organ Prelude: What Child is This
Call to Worship

Leader: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be. What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world.

People: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Welcome

Hymn **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.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us this day
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

Psalm 22 (All read the boldface verses together.)

Leader: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

**All: Why are you so far from helping me,
so far from the words of my groaning?**

Leader: O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

**All: In you, our ancestors trusted.
They trusted and you delivered them.**

Leader: It was you who brought me from the womb,
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.
Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

**All: Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near and there is no one to help.**

**God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.
God does not hide from me.
When I cry to God, God hears me.
Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 23 (All read together.)

**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul;
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
for his Name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies;
thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

Hymn: In the bleak mid-winter

1. In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.
2. Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.
3. Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
but his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
worshiped the beloved with a kiss.

4. 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.

Litany of Remembrance (The first candle is lighted)

(If you have a candle, please light it now)

Leader: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. Lighten our darkness, we pray O God; as we lift the names of those we loved before you ...

We pause to remember clearly, 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. Help us reach out together for the light of faith, for renewal and recovery and a new day coming.

All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

A period of silent reflection.

The second candle is lighted.

Leader: 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 faith, the 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 peace, shalom.

All: We remember that through God all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us in Your way.

A period of silent reflection

The third candle is lighted.

Leader: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain.

We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before You our worries for the future and we trust You to guide us.

All: We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter is upon us and though the night is dark, we know that you bring light to dark places and hope to uncertainty.

A period of silent reflection

The fourth candle is lighted.

Leader: We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the story of Christmas, which began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness. We remember that the loving God who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

All: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us on the way.

A period of silent reflection

Solo: Hope is a Star

(soloist) Percy Cooper

The Prayers of the People

Leader: God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain. As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of Longest night, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts – sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words.

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer

Leader: God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas. We remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life. We have lost a loved-one, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves

adrift and alone. We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn. We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season. We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us both here and through-out the world who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Your peace.

Lord in your mercy

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us, and cannot be again. With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weight heavy on our hearts. Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes.

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give Your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for Your love's sake. Amen.

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Hymn **Away in a Manger** (all stand)

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little lord Jesus laid down his sweet head
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little lord Jesus asleep in the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is night.

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care
And take me to heaven to live with thee there.

Leader: Let us pray

All: Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and for the blessings of this day. We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, still you are there. Help us to remember you and listen for your voice in the words of family, friends and strangers. Kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world and in our lives.

Let the light of your Holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness, lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten, and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts that when we leave this place it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.

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Hymn **Silent Night** (Sung by all, standing.)

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.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Leader: Let us pray.

**All: Another day will come, O God.
I know not what it may bring forth,
but make me ready, God, for whatever it may be.
If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.
If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.
If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.
And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words,
And give me the Spirit of Your Peace.
Amen**

Leader: O God, support us all the day long in this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then Lord, in your mercy, grant us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen

Leader: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, Both now and forever ore. Amen

Postlude: Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Participating in this evening's service:

Worship Leader: Deborah Kerner
Organist: Maria Lim

