



*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
John 1:5*

Longest Night Worship Service
Thursday ~ December 21, 2023



48 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY ~ (585) 223-0634 ~ www.blcfairport.org
The Rev. Abigail Zang Hoffman and The Rev. Amy Walter-Peterson, co-Pastors

Thursday, December 21, 2023 ~ 7:00 pm
Longest Night Worship Service

GATHER

Thank you to our Dulcimer Group for providing music as we gather for worship.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Tonight the earth tilts and tips, its axis pulling this half of the world away from the sun.

This is the longest night.

The shadows lengthen. The darkness lingers.

Those we love don't always notice, but it's true:

this is the longest night.

Tonight, we bring to God what weighs on us in the small hours.

This is the longest night.

This gathering darkness is not a threat but a shelter, a time to name what is true: Sometimes joy doesn't come easily.

Yet God still meets us.

Sometimes merriness is not within reach.

Yet God still meets us.

Sometimes despair doesn't depart at dawn.

Yet God still meets us.

Come, bring your whole selves to God.

God's arms are open wide.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES

We begin worship this evening in darkness on this longest night of the year. But just as the days will begin to lengthen after this evening, light slowly seeps into our worship time and space, flowing in around song and Scripture, prayer and lament, reminding us that light – Jesus Christ, the Light of the world – is coming.

The Advent candles are lit in silence.

KYRIE



Lord, have mer - cy__ on your peo - ple. Christ have mer - cy__ on__ us.
Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.__ Chri - ste e - le - i - son.



Shine your light in__ to our dark - ness. Fill__ us__ with your ho - ly love.
Heal all__ con - flicts be - tween na - tions. Teach us__ how to__ live as one.



Be our strength in times of__ trou - ble. Set us free from chains that__ bind.
Show us how to love our__ neigh - bor. Run to those who__ cry for__ help.



Breathe new_ life in - to our__ spir - its. Pu - ri - fy our__ hearts and minds.
Word made flesh who lives a - mong us; Christ our__ Lord, Em - man - u - el.

Please stand

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray. God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening with feelings of grief and pain, seeking consolation in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings and seasons. In this season of preparing for the coming of the true light, dear God, be with us in our darkness. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy, and love that you promise to all of your people through the gift of your son Jesus.

Amen.

HYMN

Holy Child within the Manger

WOV 638

(Music is printed in the back of this bulletin for your convenience)

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Please be seated

READING: Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

READING: Lament Psalm 19

What do they celebrate in the sanctuary, O God?

And of what do they sing in joyful procession?

In their exuberance their voices fill the sky with song, and my ears are filled with their praise of you, their songs of thanksgiving for your advent.

How can I join their singing, O God, if you do not come to me? How can I shout "Gloria" if you will not advent here?

O my God,

there is an inn in my heart where the door is open to you. Please, Holy One, be born anew to me. Please come into my misery. Please live in my despair. Do your birthing in my manger so that I may once again hear in my heart the good news of great joy.

Send me an angel, O God,

to announce that you have heard my cry and will come to me in my sorrow.

Then, O God,

I will once again be able to tell the story of this thing that has happened in my heart. Once again my voice will be raised and I will sing in procession and celebrate in the sanctuary and with the angels praise your holy name.

Glory to you, O God, who advents even into the life
of one who weeps the day away.

Glory to you in the highest,
for you are not ashamed to walk with me in darkness.

You have heard my cry and turned to me,
and I have seen a great light.

Please stand

The holy gospel according to John.
Glory to you, O Lord.

GOSPEL: John 1:1-5, 10-14

In 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.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SHARING GOD'S MEAL

Our Lord invites us to His table to receive the meal of everlasting life. At this table, we join our loved ones of every time and place. We are fed by the God who swallows up death forever and mends our brokenness.

THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

Share the peace in a way that cares for friend and neighbor.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Holy God of Advent:

You became weak so we could find strength in moments of heartbreak;

You left the safety of heaven to wander the wilderness of our world,
holding our hands when we feel so hopeless;

You set aside your glory to hold our pain so we might be healed,
even when there seems to be no hope;

You became one of us, so we could never be alone, in any moment, in any
circumstance.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

So come now, Child of Bethlehem, to strengthen us in these days. May we feel your presence in a way we have never known, not just as One born in a stable long ago and far away, but as One born in our hearts, in our hopes, in our spirits, in our weakness.

You have promised to go before us: into our brokenness, into hospital rooms, into empty houses, into graveyards, into our future held by our God, and you are here, even now, waiting for each of us: to serve us, to hold us, to comfort us, to live in us. For these blessings we give you thanks, Holy Father, through your Son, Jesus Christ and in the unity of the Holy Spirit: one God, forever and ever. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

We prepare for you, praying as you taught us,

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who

sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours,

now and forever. Amen

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

The time is now! Taste and see God's goodness!

Thanks be to God!

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

Our communion bread is gluten-free, unless noted by the pastor. Grape juice is available; indicate your need to the communion assistant.

TABLE BLESSING

May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and keep you in his grace.

Amen.

THE CANDLE LIGHTING

The congregation is invited to form a circle around the baptismal font.

We come together on this, the longest and darkest night of the year, to gather around the font, to remember all that brings us pain and sorrow and to offer the deepest prayers and desires of our hearts for hope and healing. In the darkness of this evening, we remember all those whom God placed in our lives to give us light. May God be with us.

*Each person may light a candle and offer the name of loved ones.
Please be sure to only tip the unlit candle. When all candles are lighted:*

For the light of Christ that burns in our midst and lights our life, we give thanks. May this holy season be warmed by our memories and God's promise. We hear in the gospel of John that Christ is the true light and "*the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*" Tonight we know that Christ is the light in our darkness. And we give thanks to God that he is a light that no darkness can ever overcome.

HYMN

Silent Night, Holy Night!

ELW 281

(Music is printed in the back of this bulletin for your convenience)

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray together.

O Lord our God, you see, know, and feel the pain of the world. Look upon us when we feel alone, and enfold us with your love, that in the midst of pain we may know your presence; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

SENDING

BENEDICTION

May the love of Christ embrace you, hold you, grant you peace, and give you light in the days to come.

Amen.

All are welcome to sit and meditate in the sanctuary following the service.

BLC Musicians

Rich Towsley, Director of The Folk Group and BLC Dulcimers

Merry Christmas!

We wish you and yours a blessed Christmas!

A Gift for You!

Beginning Christmas Day and continuing throughout the 12 Days of Christmas, listen in to short conversations with co-Pastors Abigail Zang Hoffman and Amy Walter-Peterson. Look for the ***Between Sundays podcast*** wherever you listen.

Worship: We worship each Sunday at 8:55 am (both in-person and livestream). Visit our website – blcfairport.org – for information on how to share in worship with Bethlehem!

Learn about upcoming events and activities... please sign-up to receive communication from Bethlehem, including Between Sundays (Mondays), the Weekly Star (Thursdays) and Ready for Worship (Saturdays). To subscribe, go to www.blcfairport.org and scroll down to sign up for reminders and special announcements. (*Let the office know if you prefer your information in paper copies.*)

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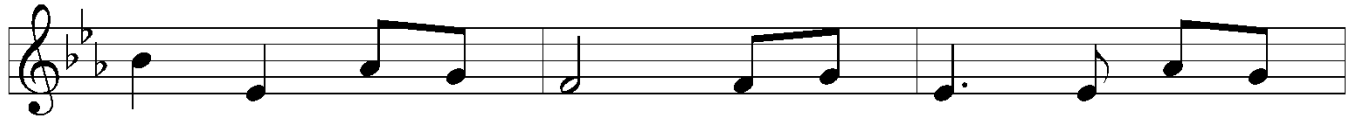
Lament Psalm 19: From Psalms of Lament by Ann Weems. ©1995 Ann Weems.

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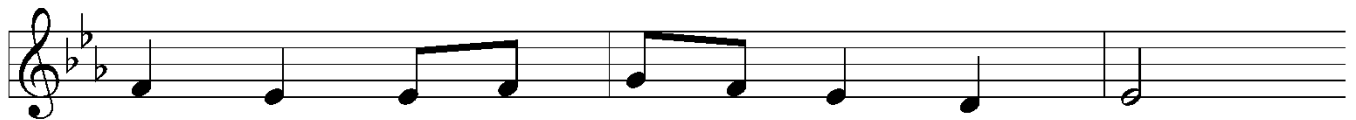
Eucharistic Prayer is adapted from *Playing Hopscotch in Heaven: Lectionary Liturgies for RCL Year A* by Thom M. Shuman



1 Ho - ly Child with - in the man - ger, long a -
 2 Once a - gain we tell the sto - ry— how your
 3 Ho - ly Child with - in the man - ger, lead us



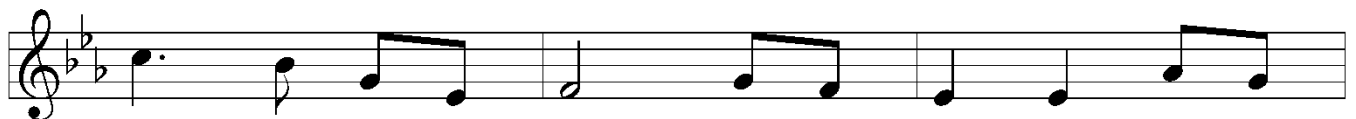
go yet ev - er near; come as friend to ev - 'ry
 love for us was shown, when the im - age of your
 ev - er in your way, so we see in ev - 'ry



stran - ger, come as hope for ev - 'ry fear.
 glo - ry wore an im - age like our own.
 stran - ger how you come to us to - day.



As you lived to heal the bro - ken, greet the
 Come, en - light - en with your wis - dom, come and
 In our lives and in our liv - ing give us



out - cast, free the bound, as you taught us love un -
 fill us with your grace. May the fire of your com -
 strength to live as you, that our hearts might be for -



spo - ken, teach us now where you are found.
 pas - sion kin - dle ev - 'ry land and race.
 giv - ing and our spir - its strong and true.

Text: Marty Haugen, b. 1950

Music: JOYOUS LIGHT, Marty Haugen, b. 1950

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Stil - le Nacht, hei - li - ge Nacht! Al - les schläft,
 1 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! All is calm,
 2 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Shep - herds quake
 3 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Son of God,



ein - sam wacht nur das trau - te, hoch - hei - li - ge Paar.
 all is bright round yon vir - gin moth - er and child.
 at the sight; glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far,
 love's pure light ra - diant beams from your ho - ly face,



Hold - er Kna - be im lok - ki - gen Haar, schlaf in himm - li - scher
 Ho - ly In - fant, so ten - der and mild, sleep in heav - en - ly
 heav'n - ly hosts . . . sing, al - le - lu - ia! Christ, the Sav - ior, is
 with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace, Je - sus, Lord, at your



Ruh, schlaf in himm - li - scher Ruh.
 peace, sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
 born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!
 birth, Je - sus, Lord, at your birth.