**SALT PARISH**

## The Longest Night

## ~ ~ December 20, 2022 ~~

On this night, we remember those for whom the holidays are not joyful; they are lonely, in mourning, feeling alienated and cast apart from family celebrations; they are experiencing depression and sadness and yet are often compelled to "put on a happy face" for others, denying their true feelings.

**Call to Worship**

P*:*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.
**C: 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.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

**First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11**
For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: 2a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; 7a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. 9What gain have the workers from their toil? 10I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.

11He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

**Psalm 23**
1The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

4Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

**Second Reading: Isaiah 40**
Comfort, 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.

25To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. 26Lift 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.

27Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? 28Have 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. 29He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. 30Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; 31but 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.

**Litany of Remembrance**
*The first candle is lighted.*

*P:* We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost.
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.

**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, 0 Israel.**

*A period of silent reflection*

*The second candle is lighted.*
*P:* 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.

**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, 0 Israel.**

*A period of silent reflection*

*The third candle is lighted.*

*P:*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 the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

**O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy 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.**

*A period of silent reflection*

*The fourth candle is lighted.*

*P:* We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable.
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.

**O come desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind**
**Bid then our sad, divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*A period of silent reflection*

**The Prayers of the People**
P*:* 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, hear our prayer,
**All: And in Your merciful love, answer.**

P*:* 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 beloved, 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, hear our prayer.
**All: And in Your merciful love, answer.**

P*:*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 throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Thy peace. Lord, hear our prayer.
**All: And in Your merciful love, answer.**

P*:*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, weigh 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, hear our prayer,
**All: And in Your merciful love, answer.**

P*:* Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give thine 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 thy love's sake. Amen.

**Hymn** ***“Away in a Manger”***
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 nigh.

**Third Reading: Luke 2:1-7**
In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

P*:* Let us pray. 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 to 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.

**Hymn** ***“Silent Night”***

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!

**Concluding Prayers**
P*:* Let us pray. 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 thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

**Blessing and Dismissal**
P*:* 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 more. Amen.

P: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**SALT Parish**

**Blue Christmas Service**



**Tuesday, December 20, 2022**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Culver**

**6:30 pm**