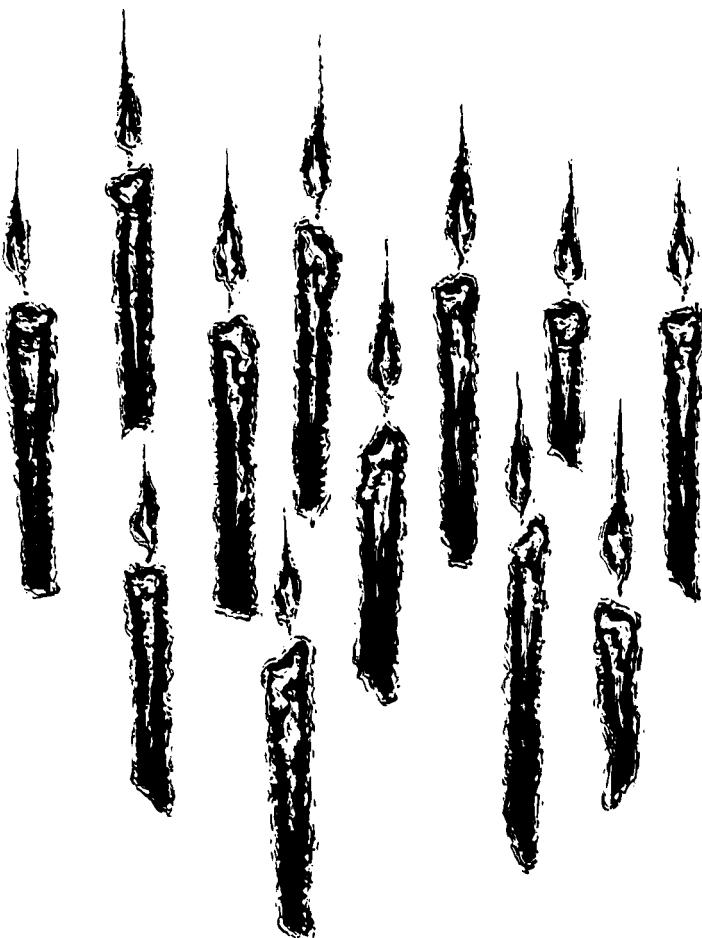


WORSHIP FOR THE LONGEST NIGHT



hosted by
**THE SOUTHWESTERN
TEXAS SYNOD**

WELCOME

We are glad we can be connected from across the distance today.

For many of us the sparkle, cheer, and brightness of this season grate against our raw and grieving places, where hope feels distant. Illness, aging, depression, loneliness, unemployment, and loss are magnified. Even those who are not struggling with immediate losses are feeling the stress and trauma of this strange pandemic time. Tonight, we come together seeking healing and room to be present to our grief, sadness, loneliness, or confusion when these emotions often feel out of place during the holidays.

As you prepare to worship from wherever you are...you are invited to look for the sacred space that is in the midst your every day life. God is with us. You may want to create a small focal point on a table—with a candle, flower, or cross... a bowl of water to represent the promises of Baptism...or other sign that reminds you of God's presence with you. Take a moment to breathe and be present in this unsettling time. May God settle your heart as we worship. Peace be with you!

In the Northern Hemisphere, December 21 is the longest night, the winter solstice. It marks the shortest day of the year, the official start of winter. Tradition says that nature and all her creatures stop and hold their breath to see if the sun will turn back from its wanderings, if the days will lengthen and the earth will once again feel the sun's warmth. On this darkest day of the year, we come with our honest yearnings seeking the return of light and hope.

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit gathers us in unity.

PRELUDE

“In Deepest Night”

T. Pavlechko, Arr. A. Krentz

WELCOME & PRAYER

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

Amen.

We have come to this longest night of the year. For many this night of darkness has often been quelled by the brilliance of Christmas light, joyful music, and the activity of the holiday season. But perhaps those things are not enough to help us pass through the long night in this year, especially because this Christmas will be like no other for us. For this has been a year of heartache and heartbreak... Difficulty, disease, and division. Far too many of us come to this night with broken bodies, weary minds, and heavy hearts...with the need to find again joy, peace, and hope in the promise of the Savior.

I'm Bishop Sue Briner of the Southwestern Texas Synod, and it is my privilege to welcome you to this service, a time when we can open our hearts and minds to the presence of God among us...a time to speak to God and to let God speak to us through these readings and prayers, music and images—chosen to lift our hearts in the awareness that God is with us in the darkness of life as much as God is with us in the light of life...that all of life and all of us are always God's loving and gracious hands.

Let us begin in prayer.

Creator God,

who formed the earth and scattered the stars across the heavens to form the beauty of the night. Come to us on this longest of nights with your grace and peace. Console us as we cry out our pain and loss. Enliven us as we hear your word of promise. Hear us when we lift our prayers for ourselves and others, and enfold us with hope as we await the coming of your Son, our Savior, Jesus the child of the manger...on that holiest of nights.

Amen.

LITANY FOR LOSSES

Wherever we are on this longest night of the year, we lift our voices before God to name our laments and losses.

Loss of Life

We mourn this night the loss of life.

For so many, the pandemic
has taken loved ones.

We mourn the loss of those close to us and those whose names we do not know.

We mourn those who perished
while working to save other lives.

We mourn those who died, not of pandemic,
but of other causes.

And we mourn the loss, in many cases,
of our ability to be with them as they passed,
our loss of gathering together for comfort
in the ways we needed so much.

We mourn this loss of life.

We honor and remember these loved ones.

We pray for comfort and peace.

Loss of Livelihood

We mourn this night the loss of livelihoods.

For so many, the pandemic has taken the security of food, shelter, care for families, and medical care.

We mourn the loss of businesses
that could not withstand the circumstances.

These were not just businesses,
but dreams born of passion and hard work.

We mourn those who find themselves
needing to rely on others for help
when what they really want to do
is to be able to help others.

We mourn this loss of livelihood.

We honor and remember
the dreams now deferred.

We pray for sustenance and resilience.

Loss of Love

We mourn this night the loss of love.

Our society's dilemma, centuries in the making,
has created such hatred, suffering,
oppression, and ill-will.

We mourn the loss of those
whose lives were lost to brutality and violence.

We mourn the loss of our ability
to love one another despite our differences.

We mourn that black and brown peoples
have perished and suffered
at the greatest proportion
in the pandemic of coronavirus.

We mourn the pandemic of racism
that still plagues the fabric of our communities.

We mourn this loss of love.
We honor and remember
the work of prophets who proclaim justice.
We pray for compassion and change.

Loss of Innocence

We mourn this night our loss of innocence.

We miss the normal rhythms and routines
around going to school
and getting to do hands-on learning.
We miss being silly with friends,
hugging our grandparents, playing sports,
and just being together.

We mourn this loss of innocence.

We honor and remember all God's children.
We pray for a future of goodness
for each of us.

Loss of Liveliness

We mourn this night the loss of liveliness.

For so many, this year has robbed us
of our energy, our enthusiasm,
and our sense of well-being.
We mourn teachers and leaders
and caregivers and workers
who are struggling to help those in their care,
themselves exhausted
and needing the sustenance they give to others.

We mourn the loss of all who are suffering
with anxiety and depression,
who are finding it difficult to live each day
with fullness or to find hope for tomorrow.
We mourn those we have lost to suicide.

We mourn those who find themselves
addicted to substances in order to ease the pain
that feels unbearable.

We mourn those who are experiencing
their place of shelter as an abusive place
from which they struggle to escape.

We mourn this loss of liveliness.

We honor and remember
that each person is precious and whole.
We pray for recovery and renewed vigor.

All of these losses
and others that are unspoken,
we lift up to you, O Holy One.

We remember that you have promised
to hear us and be present with us
even in the longest of nights.

Amen.

HYMN “In Deepest Night” ELW #699

In deepest night, in darkest days,
when harps are hung, no songs we raise,
when silence must suffice as praise,
yet sounding in us quietly
there is the song of God.

When friend was lost, when love deceived,
dear Jesus wept, God was bereaved;
so with us in our grief God grieves,
and round about us mournfully
there are the tears of God.

When through the waters winds our path,
around us pain, around us death:
deep calls to deep, a saving breath,
and found beside us faithfully
there is the love of God.

WORD

God preaches in Scripture, song & prayer.

Wherever we are on this longest night of the year, we on God speaking to us through Scripture.

HYMN RESPONSE

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel,"

verses 1 & 2

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

Refrain

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

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
Embracing all things far and nigh:
In strength and beauty come and stay;
Teach us you will and guide our way. *Refrain*

FIRST READING

Romans 15:12-13

A reading from Romans, the fifteenth chapter, beginning with the twelfth verse..

"The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

HYMN RESPONSE

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel,”

verses 3 & 4

O come, O come, O Lord of might,
as to your tribes on Sinai’s height
in ancient times once gave the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe.

Refrain

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

O come, O Branch of Jesse, free
your own from Satan’s tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save
and give them vict’ry o’er the grave. *Refrain*

SECOND READING

Isaiah 41:1-10

A reading from Isaiah, the forty-first chapter,
beginning with the tenth verse.

Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

HYMN RESPONSE

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel,”

verses 5 & 6

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

Refrain

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

O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;
O Son of justice, now draw near;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*

THIRD READING

Isaiah 35:10

A reading from Isaiah, chapter thirty-five, verse ten.

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN RESPONSE

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel,”

verses 7 & 8

O, come, O King of Nations, come,
O Cornerstone that binds in one;
refresh the hearts that long for you;
restore the broken, make us new.

Refrain

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

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

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*We pray for the church, the world,
and all in need. Between petitions, the people
may join in singing the Refrain:*

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord. Be strong. Take heart.

Advent God, for whom we wait, give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments and that we may know your presence, even in times of grief, isolation, sadness, and pain.

Refrain

Advent God, for whom we wait, the hours both of day and night are yours, and in you there is no fear. Be present, we pray, with those who labor in the night, especially those who watch and work on behalf of others. Grant them diligence in their watching, faithfulness in service, courage in danger, and competence in serving. Help them to meet the needs of others with confidence and compassion.

Refrain

Advent God, for whom we wait, keep watch with those who work or watch or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, and give hope to the despairing.

Refrain

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

Refrain

Amen.

MUSICAL REFLECTION

“E'en So Lord Jesus, Quickly Come”

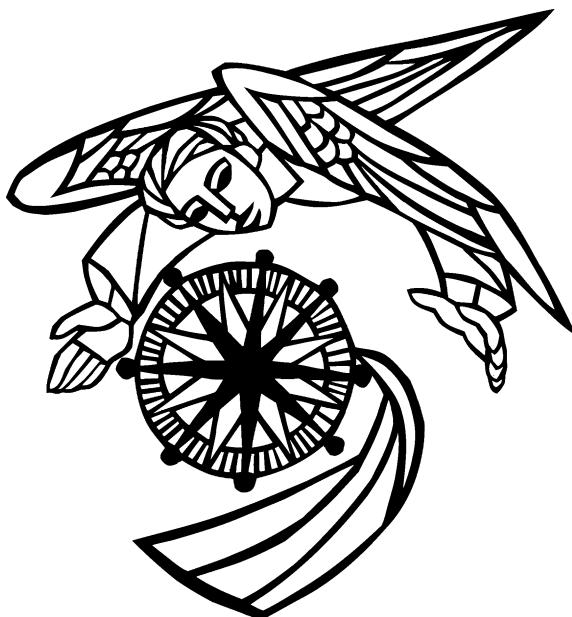
P. Manz

*Peace be to you and grace from Him
Who freed us from our sins,
Who loved us all and shed His blood
That we might saved be.*

*Sing Holy, Holy to our Lord,
The Lord, Almighty God,
Who was and is and is to come;
Sing Holy, Holy, Lord!*

*Rejoice in heaven, all ye that dwell therein,
Rejoice on earth, ye saints below,
For Christ is coming, is coming soon,
For Christ is coming soon!*

*E'en so, Lord Jesus, quickly come,
And night shall be no more;
They need no light nor lamp nor sun,
For Christ will be their All!*



SENDING

God blesses and sends us out in hope.

BLESSING FOR THE LONGEST NIGHT

And now, receive the blessing:
All throughout these months
as the shadows
have lengthened,
this blessing has been
gathering itself,
making ready,
preparing for
this night.

It has practiced
walking in the dark,
traveling with
its eyes closed,
feeling its way
by memory
by touch
by the pull of the moon
even as it wanes.

So believe me
when I tell you
this blessing will
reach you
even if you
have not light enough
to read it;
it will find you
even though you cannot
see it coming.

You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;
a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.

This blessing
does not mean
to take the night away
but it knows
its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,
knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.

So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.
Get up.
Set out on the road
you cannot see.
This is the night

when you can trust
that any direction
you go,
you will be walking
toward the dawn. Amen.

—Jan Richardson from *The Cure for Sorrow*

POSTLUDE

Presider

“Silent Night”
F. Gruber



WORSHIP LEADERS

The Rev. Susan Briner
(Bishop of the Southwestern Texas Synod)

Readers

Mr. Nate Fain
(Peace Lutheran-New Braunfels)
Ms. Hannah Hansen
(MacArthur Park Lutheran, San Antonio)
Ms. Blanca Betancourt
(Gethsemane Lutheran, San Antonio)

Litany of Losses

The Rev. Sarah Nye
(St. John Lutheran, Robstown)
Adapted from Marcia McFee (www.worshipdesignstudio.com)

Stephanie Vasquez , Marc Dunn
Karis Nye, Kidist Nye, Gene Conklin

Prayers

Deacon Darcy Mittelstaedt
(Bishop's Associate, Southwestern Texas Synod)
The Rev. Tim Bauerkemper
(First Lutheran, San Marcos)

Musicians

The Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan, harp
(Peace Lutheran-Austin)
“In Deepest Night” -
Pianist - Kristen Morrow, piano

(Peace Lutheran-Austin)
Jim Morrow, vocalist
(Peace Lutheran-Austin)
“O Come O Come Emmanuel” -
Vicar Daniel Volkmann, piano
(Shiner Lutheran-Shiner)
Ms. Mallory Volkmann, vocalist
(Shiner Lutheran-Shiner)
“Wait for the Lord” -
Andrew McNair, piano
(First Lutheran, San Marcos)
Mikki Coles & Noah Reinhuber, vocals
(First Lutheran, San Marcos)
“E’en So Lord Jesus, Quickly Come” -
The Kansas City Chorale
“Silent Night” -
Lukas Bauerkemper, cello

Photo Submissions
The Rev. Paul Birkedal
(St. John Lutheran, Robstown)
Mr. Bob Van Gulick
(Peace Lutheran, Austin)
The Rev. Chris Heinold
(Shiner Lutheran, Shiner)
The Rev. Sarah Roemer
(MacArthur Park Lutheran, San Antonio)
Deacon Darcy Mittelstaedt
(Southwestern Texas Synod, Seguin)
The Rev. Kathi Johnson
(Zion Lutheran, San Antonio)
Ms. Kiesha Priem
(Bethany Lutheran, Fredericksburg)
Ms. Denise Blomquist
(Palm Valley Lutheran, Round Rock)

Ms. Jessica Pina
(Cross Trails Ministry, Kerrville)
Ms. Megan Myers
(Cross Trails Ministry, Kerrville)

Video
The Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan &
Isabet Albert Donovan
(Peace Lutheran, Austin)

Video Production:
Paper Ketchup Productions -
Mr. Ryan Anderson
(Triumphant Lutheran, Garden Ridge)

Bulletin Translation into Spanish:
The Rev. Luis Echandia
(Gethsemane Lutheran/Iglesia Luterana San Pablo San Antonio)

Planning Team
The Rev. Judi Miller
(Southwestern Texas Synod, Seguin)
The Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan
(Peace Lutheran, Austin)
The Rev. Tim Bauerkemper
(First Lutheran, San Marcos)
The Rev. Sarah Nye
(St John Lutheran, Robstown)
Deacon Darcy Mittelstaedt
(Southwestern Texas Synod, Seguin)

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O Come O Come Emmanuel Hymn
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