



WELCOME & CALL TO WORSHIP

Good evening, and welcome to worship tonight on the Longest Night of the Year. Tonight is a night for us to be together in the dark. But, let's admit it, so often darkness...scares us. Darkness is our nightmare. We've been taught to fear it, avoid it, keep the lights on, think happy thoughts, pretend everything's all right, and "don't go into that dark place." Yet we are here tonight, in the dark, because God created light and dark, day and night... said both were good. And to fear darkness is to miss what we can see there that we can't see clearly anywhere else.

So, we are here in the dark. When I say, "Here we are," please respond with, "We are here in the dark." Here we are...

ALL: We are here in the dark.

We are here to acknowledge we are in the dark about so many things: We have so many unanswered questions. So much fear and sorrow we can't make sense of tucked away, in secret places. And for some of us, fresh grief that's raw and feels unending. Here we are...

ALL: We are here in the dark.

We can hear in this night an invitation to not run so quickly to the bright shiny objects, to easy answers, and loud well-lit rooms. This sacred darkening makes room for all of who we are, for our laments and longings, our

confessions and our cries. This darkness can help us see what we cannot see in the light. This dark and holy night can perhaps even be a night where dreams are dreamed, hope can be born. Here we are...

ALL: We are here in the dark.

Song: [O Come, O Come Immanuel](#)

O come, O come, Emmanuel
To free your captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear

***Refrain:** Rejoice! Rejoice! O Israel
To you shall come Immanuel*

Venī, Venī, Emmānuēl!
Venī, venī, Emmānuēl;
Captivum solve Isrāēl,
Quī gemit in exiliō
Prīvātus Deī Fīliō.

Refrain: Gaudē! Gaudē! Emmānuēl
Nāscētur prō tē, Isrāēl. **(Repeat Refrain Twice more)**

Psalm 42 (CEB)

Just like a deer that craves streams of water, my whole being craves you, God. My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God. When will I come and see God's face? My tears have been my food both day and night, as people constantly questioned me, "Where's your God now?"

But I remember these things as I bare my soul: how I made my way to the mighty one's abode, to God's own house, with joyous shouts and thanksgiving songs—a huge crowd celebrating the festival!

Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed? Why are you so upset inside? Hope in God! Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God. My whole being is depressed. That's why I remember you from the land [of my home.]

Deep called to deep at the noise of your waterfalls; all your massive waves surged over me. By day the Lord commands his faithful love; by night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.

I will say to God, my solid rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I have to walk around, sad, oppressed by enemies?” With my bones crushed, my foes make fun of me, constantly questioning me: “Where’s your God now?”

Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed? Why are you so upset inside? Hope in God! Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God.

Song: [The Longest Nights](#) (The Many)

Guided Meditation Mentimeter: What word or phrase or image does God invite you to hold onto during this season?

Song: How Long, O God (to the tune of Amazing Grace)

“How long, O God?” the psalmist cries, a cry we make our own, For we are lost, alone, afraid, and far away from home.

Your grace, O God, seems far away; will healing ever come? Our broken lives lie broken still; will night give way to dawn?

How can we hope? How can we sing? O God, set free our voice To name the sorrows, name the pain, that we might yet rejoice.

“How long, O God?” the psalmist cries, a cry we make our own. For we are lost, alone, afraid. Come, God, to lead us home.

Prayers of Lament:

Explanation: It is a divinely-given invitation to pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows for the purpose of helping us to renew our confidence in God.

Four parts: **Turn to God.** (Name or describe God.) **Bring your complaint.** (Be specific. Honestly identify the pain, questions, and frustrations raging in our souls.) **Ask for help.** (Ask boldly for what you need in order to experience the peace the angels sang.) **Choose to trust.** (Renew our commitment to trust in God as we navigate the brokenness of life. Remain open to new possibilities.)

Create your Lament (background music [Adagio for Strings](#))

Sharing our Laments Invitation and Lighting our Candles of Hope

Song: 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 all on earth.

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

Blessing: Go now trusting that in this darkness, even now, seeds are growing, hope is being born, and new dreams are being dreamed. Go in the embrace of the God of powerful love, the Christ of humanity and vulnerability, and the Spirit that is always, always with us and for us. Amen.



All Christmas Eve Worship Services will be Livestreamed