

St. John's United Church of Christ

Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

3 P.M. Worship Dec 21, 2024

Longest Night

WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Ringling of the Chimes

Prelude

Welcome

(Please note the * indicates when you should stand

Members and Visitors please make note of your attendance by signing in on the pew pads.)

PRAYER

Come, God-with-us:

Who braves our rejection and hurt,

Who holds us in acceptance and love.

Come God-for-us:

Who whispers in our ears

That each of us are beloved children.

Come God-under-us:

Who cradles us in arms that never grow weary;

Whose lap has room for all.

Come, God-over-us:

Who watches in the long silence of the night,

That we might rest in peace.

Come, God-beside-us:

Who steadies us when we falter,

Who lifts us up when we fall.

Come, God-behind-us:

Who picks up all the faded dreams We drop along the way,

And patchworks them into hope.

O come, O come, Immanuel:

And we will rejoice forever. Amen

**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 thee, O Israel.**

**O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
(Refrain)**

**O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
and order all things, far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge of show,
and cause us in her ways to go. (Refrain)**

**O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
(Refrain)**

Advent Wreath

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.

We light the Advent Wreath candles as a sign that when all seems dark, there is still light, however small or dim it may seem.

This candle represents our grief. We own the pain of losing loved ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair.

This candle represents our courage. It symbolizes the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share our feelings honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

This candle represents our memories. For the times we laughed together, cried together, were angry with each other or overjoyed with each other. We light this candle for the memories of caring and joy we shared together.

This candle represents our love. The love we have given, and the love we have received. The love that has gone unacknowledged and unfelt, and the love that has been shared in times of joy and sorrow.

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

Scriptures: Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

John 1:1-16

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And 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. (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

One: This is the Word of the Lord.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Hymn	<i>"In the Bleak Midwinter"</i>	
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. 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 incarnate, Jesus Christ.	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. 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.	

Poem - Christmas Spirit by Ann Weems

The Christmas Spirit is that hope
which tenaciously clings
to the hearts of the faithful

and announces in the face
of any Herod the world can produce
and all the inn doors slammed in our faces
and all the dark nights of our souls

that with God
all things are possible,
that even now
unto us a child is born!

Lighting of Candles

Blessing:

"Come, Light of Life"

by John Harvey

Lord, in the beginning when all was very dark, you said: Let there be light. And there was light and life throughout the universe.

And when the human race was exhausted, tired and weary, In the darkness of anxiety, confusion and sin, Into that darkness you came as light in Jesus Christ. God became a human being among us all.

Once again it is dark. Not just dark at midnight but dark in ourselves: Dark with doubt, Dark with fear and uncertainty, Dark with confusing and conflicting voices in our ears.

Come, Light of Life, lighten the darkness in our lives with your mighty word of love. Lighten our hearts with the joy of your promised coming. Lighten our world with the hope that faith in you brings.

We travel towards Christmas Day in the peace of Jesus Christ.

May his peace that lightens the soul with faith, lifts the spirit with hope, and leavens the world with love, be yours tonight and always.

And the blessing of God, the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer, go with you and remain with you now and always. Amen.

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(You may leave quietly whenever you are ready.)

Pastor: Rev. Katie Jo Bielke

Director of Music Ministry: Ruth Notch

Join us Tuesday for Christmas Eve Candle Light Service offered at both 4 and 7 p.m.