



THE LONGEST NIGHT

DECEMBER 18, 2024, 6:30 PM

ST. MARK EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

HAMILTON, NEW JERSEY

*A family of faith, rooted in Word and Sacrament,
proclaiming the redeeming love of Jesus Christ
through worship, nurture, and service.*

INTRODUCTION TO THE DAY

Sometimes called "Blue Christmas" or "Mourning into Dancing," this Longest Night service is held near the date of the winter solstice. It offers participants the opportunity to reflect on the grief, burdens, or challenges of the holiday season, extending God's gentle comfort. Psalm 91 describes God's unfailing shelter. Genesis 32 tells the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel through the night. In Luke 2, joy and sorrow mingle as the infant Jesus is dedicated at the temple. Through it all, God loves and comforts us.

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God

WELCOME

PRELUDE

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.

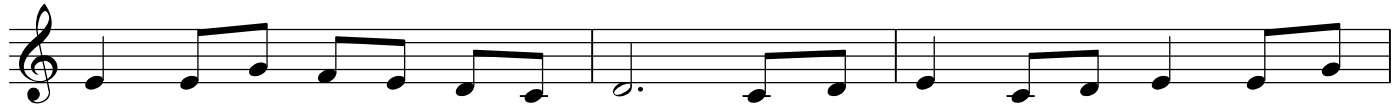
God's arms are open wide.

GATHERING HYMN

OUT OF TIME



1. Out of time, out of space, now we hope for bet - ter days, keep - ing
2. Time flows fast; make it slow, give more time for all we love. Time grows
3. When the earth yearns for peace and the peo - ple cry for bread with a



watch when the wait - ing wears us down. Drawn out thin, pulled in tight, search - ing
long; turn our wait - ing to its end. In our years, in our days, God, your
hun - ger that you a - lone can fill, we will pray, we will work, we will

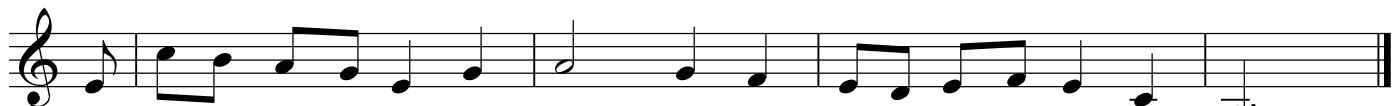


for the break of day, will we ev - er find you draw - ing near?
good - ness is at work. Can it be you might be draw - ing near?
all pre - pare the way, and in time we find you draw - ing near.

Refrain



You come to us from just be - yond, you call to us from out of time,



you tear the heav - ens op - en wide, shin - ing love a - cross the star - lit sky.

LIGHTING THE FIRST CANDLE

The shadows lengthen.

The evening is here.

This is the longest night of the year.

Let our faith flicker against our incomprehension.

The first candle is lit.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

“Do you not know that all of us
who have been baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?”

Do you not know—
that death is part of the life
we receive at this font?
That one thing has to end
so that something else can begin?

Yes, we do know:

Death is tied to life.

Sadness rubs shoulders with joy.

Gift is tangled with loss.

“If we have died with Christ,
we believe that we will also live with him.”
This font delivers us into an in-between time:
**a time when our sin is drowned,
yet still makes ripples;
a time when new life is ours,
but has not yet arrived.**

But as the angels said to the shepherds:
do not be afraid.
The waters of this small font are big enough
to hold the ocean of God’s promise.
They are deep enough
to contain the complexity of our life with Christ.
They are wide enough
to wash over everything we are:
sinner and saint,
dreamer and mourner,
entirely human and image of God.
The moment of our baptism
holds the eternity of God’s grace. **Amen.**

LIGHTING THE SECOND CANDLE

Small stars glow above.

We ponder the signs here today.

We await news of the Savior born far away.

**Stars whisper old light
on a night of new love.**

The second candle is lit.

PSALM 91

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

For God will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;

God will cover you with God's pinions,
and under God's wings you will find refuge;
God's faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling-place,
no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.

For God will command the angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.

When they call to me, I will answer them;

I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.

With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

PRAYER

Creator of the stars of night, you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. You are still as the North Star and steadfast as the dawn. Reveal yourself where we least expect you: in the longest night, in the most difficult times, in the sheer silence when words fail us. Faithful One, abide with us every moment.

Amen.

LIGHTING THE THIRD CANDLE

Candlelight leaps upward.

We raise our hearts to God.

The Spirit's wings are open broad.

**Hover over chaos;
speak your holy Word.**

The third candle is lit.

READING: GENESIS 32:22-32

The same night [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

READING: LUKE 2:25-35

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

INVITATION TO REFLECTION

As the music begins, you are invited to reflect on various aspects of this season. Three prayer stations are provided at the left, right, and center of the front of the sanctuary. You may move to some, all, or none of these stations as you feel moved; you may also sit and sing the music. If mobility is difficult for you, we will be glad to provide you with the materials for reflection where you are sitting.

Remembrances: Write the name of someone you are remembering this season. They may be someone who died, someone from whom you are estranged, or someone who is far away. Pause to remember them in prayer.

Carrying Heavy Burdens: Hold a stone in your palm. Pause to reflect on the burdens you carry: physical or mental illnesses, concerns about loved ones, broken relationships, deferred dreams, doubts, regrets about the past, fears of the future. As you place the rock at the foot of the cross, invite God to help you carry the weight of your burdens.

Healing Prayer: Pastor Linnéa Clark is seated in the chancel to offer you private prayer with anointing and blessing for healing. If mobility is difficult for you, she will be glad to offer prayer for you at your seat instead.

MUSIC DURING REFLECTION

In Silence We Wait

ACS 998

In si - lence we wait, in dark - ness you
come to us; bring us your light.

The musical notation for 'In Silence We Wait' consists of two staves. The first staff is a single melodic line in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics 'In si - lence we wait, in dark - ness you' are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody with lyrics 'come to us; bring us your light.' The piece ends with a double bar line.

O God, We Call

ACS 1075

O God, we call, O God, we call, from
deep in - side we yearn, from deep in - side we yearn, from
deep in - side we yearn for you.

The musical notation for 'O God, We Call' is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: 'O God, we call, O God, we call, from deep in - side we yearn, from deep in - side we yearn, from deep in - side we yearn for you.' The piano accompaniment features chords and single notes, with some measures containing triplets. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Now the Heavens Start to Whisper

ACS 901



1 Now the heav - ens start to whis - per, as the veil is grow - ing thin.
2 Heav - y clouds that block the moon - light now be - gin to drift a - way.
3 Christ, e - ter - nal Sun of jus - tice, Christ, the rose of wis - dom's seed,



Earth from slum - ber wakes to lis - ten to the stir - ring, faint with - in:
Dia - mond bril - liance through the dark - ness shines the hope of com - ing day.
come to bless with fire and fra - grance hours of yearn - ing, hurt, and need.



seed of prom - ise, deep - ly plant - ed, child to spring from Jes - se's stem!
Christ, the morn - ing star of splen - dor, gleams with - in a world grown dim.
In the lone - ly, in the strang - er, in the out - cast, hid from view;



Like the soil be - neath the frost - line, hearts grow soft to wel - come him.
Heav - en's em - ber fans to full - ness; hearts grow warm to wel - come him.
Child who comes to grace the man - ger, teach our hearts to wel - come you.

LIGHTING THE FOURTH CANDLE

In quiet dimness,

Heartbeats keep time.

In deepening vigil, we wait for a sign.

Jesus, end our waiting.

Come into our midst.

The fourth candle is lit.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

We believe in God our Maker,
who loves everything they create,
**who crafts the stars of night
and clothes the lilies of the field,**
who sets the tilt of the earth
to give days long and short,
**yet who rests beyond time
in the presence of every moment.**

We believe in Jesus Christ,
God's own Child,
**who was in the beginning with God
and in whom all things hold together,**
who stepped out of eternity and into flesh,
who delighted in the dim closeness of the womb
to be born of the girl named Mary,
**who was praised by shepherds at midnight
and sought by stargazing Wise Ones,**
whose death on the cross eclipsed joy,
and who rose again three days later
in the darkness before the dawn;
who will come again.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
our Advocate,
**who twines through every season
and ties together sunset and new dawn,**
who comforts us in the night
and calls us through dream and vision,
**who brings oil for the sputtering lamp
and eloquence to the sputtering heart,**
whose breath brings new life,
and whose body is this Body.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Trustworthy God, God who knows us, we pray to you.

We pray over our yesterdays, for every burden we have carried from yesterday into today...

We pray over the day that has been, in thanksgiving for what we have experienced, in sadness for what we have lost, and for all that is incomplete...

This longest night, we pray over the season and this turning world, for those struggling through the holidays, for people in crisis and despair, for all in need of healing, and for every circumstance awaiting daylight and hope...

We pray for our tomorrows, as many as we may receive...

We pray for all things out of season: grief that we carry that separates us from those who feel merry; impatience that drives us forward in a season of waiting; the centering peace we draw from you in this frantic world...

And we pray for the great day of your joy, which will come when it comes—never too soon, never when we expect, not in the way we have planned....

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, the One for whom we wait.

Amen.

LIGHTING THE FIFTH CANDLE

Some sigh with impatience.

Others pray in relative peace.

God, you illuminate gently;

you light our way

with a quiet transcendence.

The fifth candle is lit.

Please stand as you are comfortable.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

May God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Let us bless the bread
that gives itself to us
with its terrible weight,
its infinite grace.

Let us bless the cup
poured out for us
with a love
that makes us new.

Let us gather

around these gifts
simply given
and deeply blessed.

And then let us go
bearing the bread,
carrying the cup,
laying the table
within a hungering world.

On the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat;
this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper,
he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

These are the gifts of God for the people of God, holy things for holy people, and they are for you.

Please be seated.

We share communion with wheat and gluten-free wafers, wine, and juice. Everyone is welcome to receive communion, regardless of religious background or age.

TABLE BLESSING

The body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in his grace.
Amen.

LIGHTING THE SIXTH CANDLE

A circle of flame grows;

so do our prayers.

We do not rush the dawn, nor do we despair.

We rest in God's warm presence

as we prepare for rest.

The sixth candle is lit.

Please stand as you are comfortable.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

CHARGE AND BLESSING

As you leave this time of worship
and step into the remaining hours of this night,
take with you the peace of Jesus Christ,
who existed from the first instant of eternity,
and waited nine months in Mary's womb;
who counted off the first moments of creation,
and spent three days among the dead;
who lived thirty-some years in a timebound body,
and says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Go with the blessing of the triune God,
Creator of all time,
Savior of our days, +
Mender of every moment.

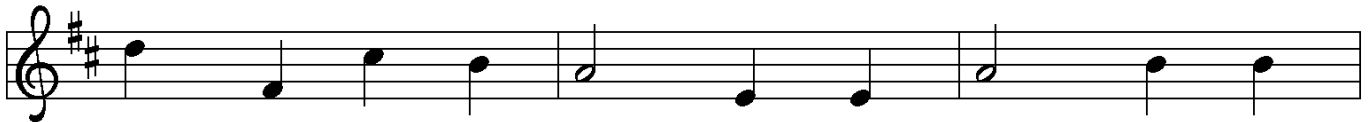
Amen.



1 As the dark a - waits the dawn,
 2 As the blue ex - pec - tant hour
 3 As the moon re - flects the sun
 4 Shine your fu - ture on this place,



so we a - wait your light. O Star of
 be - fore the sil - v'ring skies, we long to
 un - til the night's de - crease, may we your
 en - light - en ev - 'ry guest, that through us



prom - ise, scat - ter night, lov - ing bright, lov - ing
 see your day a - rise, whole and wise, whole and
 heal - ing light re - lease, liv - ing peace, liv - ing
 stream your ho - li - ness, bright and blest, bright and



bright, till shades of fear are gone.
 wise, O lu - cent Morn - ing Star.
 peace, un - to your ho - ly dawn.
 blest; come dawn, O Sun of grace.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Wait for God. **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE

Worship with Us

We gather for worship on Sundays at 9:30 am (a full-length, more formal service) and on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm (a shorter, more informal service). You are always welcome.

We host Peace of Mindfulness, a mindfulness meditation class, on Tuesdays at 6:30 pm in the sanctuary. Beginners and advanced practitioners alike are welcome.

Advent & Christmas Services

The Biggest Fan of Jesus, an all-ages Christmas pageant: December 22, 9:30 am

Christmas Eve services: December 24, 3:00 & 8:00 pm

Lessons & Carols for Christmas: December 29, 9:30 am

Epiphany: January 5, 9:30 am

Serve with Us

We welcome volunteers every Sunday after worship to help with Lunches with Love, which prepares lunches for clients of HomeFront. Recently, we shared our 15,000th lunch! Contact Karen Breninghouse (kbreninghouse@gmail.com) for more information.

Contact Us

You can reach our office at admin@stmarkhamilton.org and at (609) 585-7087.

You can reach Pastor Linnéa Clark directly at pastor@stmarkhamilton.org or at (215) 620-4977 in case of emergency.

You can also find us online at stmarkhamilton.org and at facebook.com/stmarkhamilton.

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